Supporting the educational transitions of care leavers a qualitative investigation

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Supporting the educational transitions of care leavers: a qualitative investigation

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Abstract

Despite significant attention by policy-makers in recent years, looked-after children in England continue to perform poorly at Key Stage 4 in comparison to their peers, perhaps accounting for the limited research base on their education beyond age sixteen. In the context of relatively high levels of youth unemployment, the raising of the statutory age to which children are required to remain in education or training, and some narrowing of the Key Stage 4 attainment gap, this study addresses an issue attracting significant ongoing policy attention.

A longitudinal design enabled young people's progress to be followed during a critical time of transition in both their personal and educational lives. The research explored their experiences of these transitions, to address how they could best be encouraged and supported to continue into further and higher education. Forty-five interviews were undertaken with 21 young people in Years 11, 12 and 13. Twelve designated teachers, three staff in further education colleges and five staff in local authority 'virtual schools' were also interviewed. Analysis drew on Coleman's focal model of adolescence, resilience theory and Hollingsworth's conceptualisation of foundational rights to illuminate young people's experiences of multiple transitions as they approached adulthood and to reconsider the duties owed to care leavers by their corporate parent.

The findings suggest that recent reforms have served to ensure that professional expectations of educational attainment are now higher and that looked-after children themselves place a high value on education. However, although strengths are identified in the models of virtual heads and designated teachers, support for young people over sixteen appears to be underdeveloped; poor social work continuity and a dearth of stable relationships threaten to undermine educational progress for some young people; and recent initiatives to support young people continuing in education may operate to marginalise the most vulnerable further.

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Table of abbreviations

Association of Directors of Children's Services	ADCS
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	ADHD
Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service	Cafcass
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills	DBIS
Department for Children, Schools and Families	DCSF
Department for Education	DfE
Department for Education and Employment	DfEE
Department for Education and Skills	DfES
Department of Health	DoH
European Convention on Human Rights	ECHR
Institute of Education, University of London	IoE
National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers	NAIRO
National Children's Bureau	NCB
National Foundation for Educational Research	NFES
National Statistics	NS
Not in education, employment or training	NEET
Independent Reviewing Officer	IRO
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	PTSD
Pupil Referral Unit	PRU
Social Exclusion Unit	SEU
Special Educational Needs	SEN
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children	UASC
United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	UNCRC
Young People in Public Care: Pathways to Education in Europe	YiPPEE

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Introduction and rationale for the study

My interest in the life circumstances of looked-after children stems from my practice at the independent Bar, where I specialised in child law, and particularly care proceedings. Two issues became prominent concerns in relation to the children who were the subject of the proceedings, almost none of whom I met, but whose lives were depicted through the evidence presented to the court. The first was the inadequacy of support offered to children and their families by social care authorities in the months and years prior to the decision to take proceedings to remove the child(ren) from the care of their parent(s). The high levels of harm suffered by children who were the subject of such proceedings and their consequent vulnerability underpins the second concern and this study, namely what happened to the children and young people after a care order had been made.

Removing children from the care of their parents is a draconian step. It is a breach of the right of both the child and the parents to a private and family life under article 8(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which is incorporated into English law through the Human Rights Act 1998. A breach of article 8 by a public authority can only be justified under article 8(2), which requires that it is

> in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health and morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Consequently, taking children into state care is regarded as a last resort and in English law the making of such an order is dependent upon the court being satisfied that the child is 'suffering or likely to suffer significant harm' (Children Act 1989 section 31(2)).

Although statistics are hard to come by, the proportion of children in state care in England appears to be lower than that in many other European jurisdictions, notwithstanding a significant rise following the well-publicised case of the death of Baby Peter Connelly in 2007. The number of children in care in England peaked at 68,110 in 2013, the highest number since 1985 (DfE/NS, 2013a), and a rate of 0.6 per cent

(DfE/NS, 2013b). This compares with 1.3% of the population in Denmark (YiPPEE, undated). Although applications for care orders fell for the first time since the scandal in 2013-14, they stand at 9.2 applications per 10,000 children, compared with 5.9 applications per 10,000 children in 2008-9 (Cafcass, 2014). Whether recent changes in the pre-proceedings protocol arising from the Children and Families Act 2014 and Statutory Guidance on Court Orders and Pre-Proceedings (Department for Education, 2014e) account for this reduction, in which case it may be only a short-term phenomenon, remains to be seen: at the present time, local authorities are struggling to cope as a sharp rise in the numbers of children in their care coincides with shrinking budgets. Moreover, despite wholesale reorganisation and wide-ranging reforms under New Labour in the first decade of this century, children's social care services in England remain primarily child protection focused rather than family-support oriented, with the consequence that non-stigmatising and supportive services for parents who are struggling to care for their children are less developed than in nations such as those in Scandinavia (Lonne et al., 2009). Children entering care in England are likely therefore to have experienced a lengthy period of maltreatment or inadequate parenting and have high levels of need across all domains of their lives, including emotional and educational difficulties.

Compulsory state intervention to remove children from their parents can only be justified if the state provides the child with 'better' parenting and improved outcomes in adulthood than would have been the case if the child had remained in the care of his or her parents. Given the high levels of need and vulnerability of the looked-after population, it is difficult if not impossible to assess the extent to which the care 'system' can or does improve the lives of the children entrusted to it, and there is no means currently by which judges and lawyers involved in care proceedings can know what happened to the children on whose futures the court has adjudicated. Nonetheless, there has been for some time considerable concern regarding the poor outcomes of looked-after children, including a degree of uncertainty about the extent to which care actually improves the life-chances of looked-after children or whether in some cases it might consolidate disadvantage (Department for Education and Skills, 2006).

1.2 The education and life-chances of looked-after children

The education of looked-after children is a relatively young area of research, dating from Sonia Jackson's seminal work in the late 1980s (Jackson, 1987). Following the introduction of provisions for the review of looked-after children's welfare in the Children Act 1989, political attention to the fate of this group of children increased (Jackson, 2013a) and they came to the fore in policy under New Labour (Smith, 2009) as part of wider attempts to tackle social exclusion. Since the turn of the century, there has been considerable legislative and policy activity aimed at improving the life-chances of children who have experienced state care, including through the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children Act 2004, Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and, under the current government, the Children and Families Act 2014. At the start of this project, the role of the designated teacher for looked-after children had recently been made statutory through section 20 of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, while the post of virtual school head for looked-after children, now a statutory requirement pursuant to section 98 of the Children and Families Act 2014, had been the subject of a recent pilot. Most recently, policy has tended towards encouraging care leavers' participation in further and higher education by prioritising support for young people who remain in education longer.

Research pertaining to looked-after children is rendered complex by the diversity of the population of looked-after children (Biehal et al., 1995). It is unclear how much children's experiences in care have genuinely improved (Smith, 2009), while measurable outcomes in educational attainment have proven difficult to achieve. Consideration of the education of looked-after children has tended to take a social care, rather than educational, perspective (Jackson, 2013a) and although research has elucidated factors associated with the high achievement of looked-after children (Jackson et al., 2005; Chase et al., 2006), understanding of the challenges facing care leavers remains greater than that of effective systems to support their transition to independence (Wade and Munro, 2008). Care leavers' educational participation and attainment, and especially their experience of educational transitions, are under-researched areas (Bluff et al., 2012). Care leavers are 'among the most excluded groups of young people in society' (Stein, 2006b: page 423; Jackson, 2007), but there is some evidence that the political initiatives of the last fifteen to twenty years have begun to take effect. Jackson described progress as 'disappointingly slow' in 2010 (Jackson, 2010: page 57), but the last two years of statistics for Key Stage 4 results (DfE/NS, 2013c) show a slight narrowing of

the attainment gap between looked-after children and their peers, following a decade in which the gap had widened (DoH/NS, 2003; DfE/NS, 2011b). However, historically there has been a tendency for professionals to assume that level 2 qualifications represent the most that looked-after children can aspire to (Jackson, 2010) and currently only 6 per cent of care leavers enter higher education at the age of nineteen (DfE/NS, 2013b: National Tables F1). Perhaps as a consequence, there is little research on the education of care leavers beyond compulsory school age, not only in the UK but in other European nations as well (Höjer et al., 2008).

This deficiency in the research base is of particular concern at the present time, for two reasons. First, government reforms to require young people to remain in education and/or training to the age of eighteen are in the first year of full implementation at the time of writing; and second, the UK is currently emerging from a global recession which has had a particularly deleterious effect on youth employment. Global youth unemployment reached record levels as a consequence of the economic crisis (International Labour Office (ILO), 2012). Job-seekers with limited secondary educational qualifications are particularly vulnerable in such conditions and the decline in the employment rate in the UK for those with fewer GCSE or equivalent qualifications exceeded the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (Chung, 2012). Unsurprisingly given their generally poor educational outcomes, care leavers as a group appear more vulnerable to adverse economic circumstances such as those prevailing currently.

1.3 **The aims and objectives of the study**

Through this study I wished to address two gaps in the literature relating to looked-after children: the dearth of research on care leavers' experiences of post-sixteen education and the need for more research addressing looked-after children's educational experiences and outcomes from an educational rather than social care perspective. I also wanted to consider the effect of recent policy initiatives to encourage greater participation by care leavers in further and higher education and of the introduction of the roles of designated teacher and virtual school head on a statutory basis. The overarching aim of the study was to explore how looked-after young people experience educational transitions in Years 11-13 and how these transitions might best be supported. This is a critical time in young people's lives because they are required to

make decisions in Years 11 and 13 which are likely to influence their future career trajectories and life-chances to a significant degree. Looked-after children are likely also to experience transitions in other areas of their lives during this period, compounded for many of those ageing out of care by late entrance into care. Accordingly, I chose to undertake a longitudinal study to capture young people's experiences of these multiple transitions and the effect of decisions that they made on their early adulthood. I considered that it was unrealistic to address young people's education in isolation from their care histories (Jackson, 2013b) but included consideration of the interdependence of their care and educational experiences. The main objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the key barriers to academic progress for looked-after young people at and beyond Key Stage 4 and how looked-after young people experience and navigate these barriers;
2. To consider the interdependence of young people's experiences in and before entering care and their educational outcomes in order better to understand the most effective means by which young people may be supported to reach their educational potential;
3. To assess the effectiveness of the virtual school head and designated teacher roles in promoting the engagement and progress of looked-after young people in further education and their participation in higher education; and
4. Critically to examine the current legislative and policy environment in the light of the findings from the study with a view to identifying how young people transitioning out of care might best be supported to fulfil their educational potential.

The aims of the study are in line with three of the seven priorities identified by the Department for Education for future research in relation to children in care, namely supporting the education of looked-after children; improving the support to care leavers; and promoting strong corporate parenting and the 'voice of the child' (Department for Education, 2014a).

1.4 **Theoretical perspectives and frameworks**

There has generally been limited attention to the use of theoretical frameworks to develop understanding of the experiences of care leavers (Stein, 2006b; Lee and Berrick,

2014) and this study provided an opportunity to explore the potential of a number of theoretical models to afford greater insight into the challenges facing young people. Two of these, Coleman's focal model of adolescence (Coleman, 1974) and resilience theory, were proposed by Stein himself (Stein, 2006b) as potentially fruitful areas of enquiry. There has since been considerable research on the resilient adaptation of care leavers, which provides a flexible framework through which to incorporate consideration of the range of protective and risk factors that impact on the lives of looked-after children and facilitates a strengths-based perspective which acknowledges children's agency.

In the pilot study for this project, self-reliance (a quality akin to resilience) was a key theme arising from interviews with care leavers. Cameron has identified two dimensions to self-reliance: 'having confidence in oneself to manage one's own affairs; and preferring not to have help' (2007: page 39). Self-reliance is generally a positive attribute but may operate as a barrier to professional support (Cameron, 2007), an important consideration in this study. A longitudinal design is relatively rare in research with looked-after children and care leavers, probably because the transient nature of many children's encounters with the care system and the instability of their lives in care render such projects challenging and resource-intensive: this is a notoriously 'hard-to-reach' group. However, persisting with a longitudinal design enabled me to consider the potential insights offered by Coleman's focal model of adolescence, which posits that young people actively manage the issues confronting them in adolescence in a sequential manner. These theoretical underpinnings are explained in greater detail in Chapter 3.

I chose to incorporate a children's rights perspective for a number of inter-related reasons. The inherent tension between a rights-based and welfare-based approach to the care and upbringing of children is central to my academic practice. A rights-based discourse has become increasingly dominant internationally since the near-global ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), although children's claims to autonomy rights still attract less attention than their rights to care and protection. Despite amendments to the Children Act 1989 reflecting children's UNCRC article 12 rights to participate in decisions affecting them, English child protection law and policy remain rooted in a welfare-based paradigm, embedded in the requirement that children's

welfare is the 'paramount consideration' in the court's consideration of all matters affecting their upbringing (section 1(1)). Children in state care are conceptualised as vulnerable and treated as the objects of professional concern. Research evidence suggests that they continue to feel excluded from many of the key decisions affecting them (Cameron, 2007; Leeson, 2007; Morgan, 2014). Yet care leavers have historically been required to achieve independence earlier than their peers, experiencing 'accelerated and compressed' transitions to adulthood (Stein, 2006a: page 274). On the cusp of adulthood, young people's own perspectives are of most significance as the driving force behind the decisions that they make. Consequently, and in recognition of children's participation rights, I chose to foreground the views of young people and have to a large extent allowed the data to speak for themselves in recounting the findings of the study in Chapters 5 and 6, reserving commentary for a later chapter (Chapter 7).

More significantly, young participants to this study attained majority, and with it legal autonomy, during the course of the fieldwork, yet many care leavers are ill-equipped for independence in the modern world at the age of eighteen, as indeed are many of their peers who have not been in care. Since the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, policy has attempted to redress the lack of support previously afforded to care leavers in early adulthood in order to provide a transition to adulthood more akin to that generally experienced by children brought up in their birth families. Legislative solutions have tended to take an instrumentalist approach to the entitlements of young people to state resources (Smith, 2009) and have arguably overlooked the importance of emotional and mental health and the development of stable relationships, despite the clear research evidence in this area (Meltzer et al., 2003; Blower et al., 2004; Sinclair et al., 2005; Ford et al., 2007; Biehal et al., 2010). There has also been growing criticism in recent years that the increasingly managerial and process-driven approach to child protection social work practice has lost sight of the primacy of relationships in social work (Lonne et al., 2009; Munro, 2011). Smith (2009) makes a similar point in the context of alternative care, but blames not only the language of outcomes but also discourses of children's rights for a lack of attention to relationship-based practice. Recent developments in the theorisation of children rights have, however, addressed this deficit by incorporating considerations of relational capabilities developed by Nussbaum (2003) into understandings of the development of autonomy (Hollingsworth, 2013b). In this study I have drawn on Hollingsworth's theory of foundational rights, which incorporates

consideration of relational autonomy, in order to analyse the full basis of children's rights to ongoing state support beyond the age of legal majority.

1.5 The scope and limitations of the study

The research questions and methods for this study built on those of a pilot study involving in-depth semi-structured interviews with 7 care leavers aged sixteen to twenty (Driscoll, 2011; Driscoll, 2013a), but expanded on the earlier study by capturing the perspectives of designated teachers and virtual school heads as well as a larger number of young people and by adopting a longitudinal design. The study was designed to recruit approximately twenty young people, to interview them about their educational experiences and plans in Year 11 (aged fifteen to sixteen), and then to re-interview as many as possible in Years 12 (aged sixteen to seventeen) and 13 (at eighteen), in the expectation of a high level of disengagement as the study progressed. The designated teachers or safeguarding officers (in further educational colleges) of the young people participating in the study were also invited to participate through an interview about their wider experience of their role in supporting looked-after young people in school or college. Two local authorities agreed to support the research and ethical approval from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) was gained in order to access additional cases outside those local authorities, for example where young people in care to one authority were in school in another.

In total, 21 young people participated in the study, nine of whom were interviewed in all three years. Eighteen young people took part in Year 11, seventeen in Year 12 and ten in Year 13, making a total of 45 interviews with care leavers. Twelve designated teachers, seven in mainstream schools and five in alternative provision; three officers in further education colleges with responsibility for care leavers; and five professionals from local authority virtual schools also participated. In all, therefore, 65 interviews were conducted.

There were a number of practical and ethical challenges associated with the study, which resulted in some significant limitations. Most notable of these is the way in which selection and access arrangements affected the recruitment of young people to the study, which is addressed in some detail in Chapter 4. Additionally, decisions made in managing the study's feasibility inevitably limited its scope. First, although the study

incorporated contributions from young people and from educational professionals, the views of social workers and carers are absent. It was apparent from conversations with carers that many held strong views, particularly on the support available to them from their local authority, but these are not included in the study. Second, I did not explore issues of mental health and was therefore only aware of mental or emotional health issues raised by young people themselves, which I did not consider it ethical to pursue further given the focus of the study and my own lack of expertise in that area. The high level of need and difficulties in accessing mental health services (Mooney et al., 2009) both remain significant concerns for this group which are likely to impact on their educational experiences and attainment and should be borne in mind, particularly in relation to accounts of challenging behaviour from looked-after children. Third, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) might perhaps be the most appropriate lens through which to view the complex feelings young people have towards their birth families. There is much controversy over the use of attachment theory and associated therapies with children in care, however (Osuwu-Bempah, 2010), and given the educational focus of the study, I have not included attachment theory as a theoretical lens.

1.6 **Terminology**

For the most part, the term 'young people' is used in this thesis to refer to the young participants, in recognition of the fact that as participants were mostly over eighteen by the end of the study and all were at least fifteen at the start, they were unlikely to regard themselves as 'children'. The term 'young people' is widely used by non-governmental organisations working with older children in acknowledgement that it is generally preferred by them and in recognition of their agency and personhood. In more general or theoretical discussions, the term 'child' is used for people under the age of eighteen, reflecting the age of legal majority in English law (Family Law Reform Act 1969 section 1(1)), and in accordance with the definition of 'child' pursuant to the Children Act 1989 (section 105) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 1). Use of the term 'child' serves as a reminder that the law recognises all people under the age of eighteen as entitled to special treatment by reason of their age, an important consideration in the argument made in this thesis.

Given that young people are entitled to leave care on attaining the age of sixteen, but may be able to claim support from their corporate parent up to the age of 25, the terms

'looked-after children' and 'care leavers' are both used for the young participants in the study, who were at various stages in their journey from care to independence as the study progressed. The phrase 'ageing out of care' is also used to refer to young people transitioning from care to independent life. The term 'looked-after' children is used to encompass the range of circumstances through which children's care becomes the responsibility of the local authority, including children 'in care' through a care order pursuant to section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and 'voluntarily accommodated' under section 20. These terms and the legal routes into care are explained in greater detail in Chapter 2 and Appendix 1.1.

1.7 **Structure of the thesis**

The thesis starts with a summary of law, policy and research literature on the characteristics, experiences and outcomes of young people ageing out of care in Chapter 2, which is in three parts. In the first I briefly explain the legal status and characteristics of looked-after children, including explanation of the legal definitions and placement options and an account of recent legislation aimed at providing greater support to care leavers. More detailed analysis of the legal provisions underpinning the status of looked-after children and eligibility for leaving care services is provided in Appendix 1.1. The second section is concerned with the educational experiences and attainment of looked-after children, with particular attention to entry to further and higher education and recent initiatives aimed at reducing the 'attainment gap' between looked-after children and their peers. In the third section I address outcomes for care leavers.

The three theoretical perspectives used to underpin the analysis (Coleman's focal model of adolescence, resilience and Hollingsworth's concept of foundational rights) are introduced in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I explain the choice of methods employed and the methodological challenges encountered. The study raised a number of important ethical issues: an overview of those relating directly to the methodology is set out in this chapter. The findings from the study are addressed in Chapters 5-7. Drawing on data from young people and professionals, in Chapter 5 I consider young peope's care histories and their experience of corporate parenting, to provide a context for the exploration of their educational experiences and the barriers to their attainment in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, I discuss the inter-relationship between young people's care and educational experiences in the light of my interview data and the theories

introduced in Chapter 3. I then consider the implications of these theoretical perspectives for the exercise of corporate parenting and for policy more widely in social care and education. I draw on further data from professional participants to interrogate the role of designated teachers and virtual schools heads. In the final chapter I review the key findings from the study, consider the theoretical contribution of the study, and discuss implications for policy, practice and further research in this area.

1.8 **Conclusion**

Jackson draws attention to the propensity for the education of looked-after children to 'fall off the social care agenda' (2013a: page 3). This is likely to be particularly the case when the care population is close to an all-time high (DfE/NS, 2013a) and children's social care budgets are under increasing strain as a result of austerity measures, which have had a significant impact on leaving care services and complementary provision (Briheim-Crookall, 2012). Yet in post-industrial societies, education is increasingly central to young people's life chances (International Labour Office (ILO), 2012). Through this study I have endeavoured to draw attention to the complexities involved for young people negotiating multiple transitions as they approach legal adulthood, as well as to the potential for looked-after young people who may not have achieved their academic potential by the end of Key Stage 4 to make up any educational deficit thereafter, and the ways in which they might best be supported to do so.

Chapter 2

Care, education and transition to adulthood: a review of law, policy and literature

2.1 Introduction

Looked-after children's educational experiences and attainment can be understood only in the wider context of their lives and care (Jackson, 2013a). The circumstances leading to their entry into care combined with their unique status as the children of 'corporate parents' affect all aspects of their lives at home and in school. In this chapter I briefly explain the legal status of looked-after children and the practical implications of the legislative provisions on children's care placements and contact with their birth families. I consider the diversity and key characteristics of this small but distinct population and their entitlement to support as they transition into adulthood. I consider law, policy and research in relation to the education of looked-after children and the outcomes for care leavers. Through this literature review I identify the key issues which arise from recent research and policy development in this area and which have influenced the particular focus of this study.

2.2 Looked-after children in law and practice

2.2.1 *The legal status and entitlements of looked-after children*

Under section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 (the Act), there are two primary categories of children defined as 'looked after' by the state (hereinafter 'looked-after children'): those in the care of their local authority and those who are accommodated by their local authority. In this section I provide a brief overview of the relevant provisions, which are set out in greater detail at Appendix 1.1.

Children 'in care' are subject to a care order under section 31(1)(a) of the Act. The appropriate balance between the protection of children and the rights of children and parents to family life is an exceptionally difficult one to achieve (Fortin, 2009), but under English and international law, there is a strong emphasis on the rights of children and their parents to a family life together (see for example, ECHR article 8, UNCRC

article 9, Re L [2007]). Since the Children Act 1989 came into force in 1991, local authorities have only had the power to remove children from their homes without the express agreement of those with parental responsibility for them with the authority of a court. Under section 31(2), a court may only make a care order if it is satisfied (*inter alia*) 'that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm' (the 'threshold criteria'). Although maltreatment remains under-reported in high-income countries (Gilbert et al., 2009a), greater awareness and policy initiatives in the last thirty years have resulted in increasing identification and referral in the UK (Gardner and Brandon, 2009). This has contributed to resourcing pressures on local authorities and high thresholds for intervention (Ofsted, 2008).

Under a care order, the local authority gains parental responsibility for the child (section 33(3)(a)), which is shared with other persons with parental responsibility. The local authority has power to determine the extent to which those others may exercise their parental responsibility (section 33(3)(b)), but it may not exercise that power unless 'satisfied that it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard or promote the child's welfare' (section 33(4)). These provisions have been criticised both for providing weak control over the child to the local authority and for tokenistic treatment of parents' rights, but may be regarded as consistent with the requirement of the ECHR that states' treatment of children removed from their parents must be consistent with the ultimate aim of reunification (Bainham and Gilmore, 2013).

Section 22(1)(b) covers a broader category of 'accommodated' children. Although children accommodated by the local authority become 'looked-after children' and are therefore potentially eligible for leaving care services, the local authority does not acquire parental responsibility for them. The most common pathway to accommodation is pursuant to section 20 of the Children Act 1989, colloquially referred to as 'voluntary' accommodation because it is not the consequence of a court order but an agreement between the local authority and the child's parents and/or the child him or herself. This group comprises children 'in need' (defined in section 17) for whom no person has parental responsibility (including orphans and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)); children who are lost or abandoned; and children whose carer is unable, either permanently or temporarily, to provide suitable accommodation or care, for example by reason of physical or mental ill-health (section 20(1)).

Children may also become accommodated and thereby gain looked-after status through emergency protection or the youth justice system (see Appendix 1.1). Additionally, the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) amended the law to endow looked-after status on all children remanded to youth detention accommodation (which includes remands to secure children's homes, secure training centres and young offender institutions (LASPO section 102(2)). Concerns have been expressed not only that the extension of looked-after status to this additional group of young people may result in an unmanageable burden for local authorities (Higgs, 2012) but also that these young people will be inadequately supported as they are not entitled to a permanence plan (Puffett, 2013).

2.2.2 ***Placement***

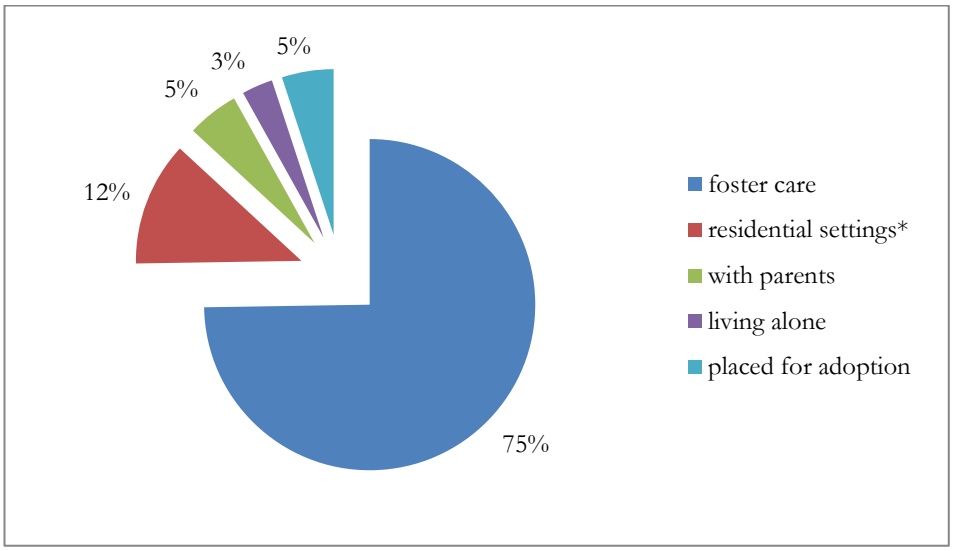
2.2.2.1 Placement options

By reason of their family circumstances and/or pre-care experiences (considered in greater detail in section 3.3.2), looked-after children, through whichever route they enter local authority care, require a high standard of parenting. Once a child is looked after, it is the duty of the local authority to safeguard and promote his or her welfare (section 22(3)(a)) and 'to make such use of services available for children cared for by their own parents as appears to the authority reasonable' in his or her case (section 22(3)(b)). In making any decision in relation to a child that the local authority is looking after or proposes to look after, the local authority must give 'due consideration' to 'such wishes and feelings of the child as they have been able to ascertain', 'having regard to his age and understanding' (section 22(5)(a)), as well as to the wishes and feelings of his or her parents, any other person with parental responsibility for the child, and any other person whose wishes and feelings the authority consider to be relevant (section 22(5)(b)), and to 'the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background' (section 22(5)(c)).

The local authority is required to provide the child with accommodation and maintenance (section 22A and section 22B). Under section 22C, added pursuant to the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, the authority must arrange for the child to live with a parent; another person with parental responsibility; or a person who was the holder of a residence order in respect of a child immediately prior to the making of the care order, unless it would not be consistent with the child's welfare or reasonably

practicable (section 22(2)-(4)). In that case, the local authority must place the child in the 'most appropriate placement available' (section 22C(5)). In determining the most appropriate placement, the local authority must give preference to placement with a relative or friend or 'other person connected with' the child, provided that the person is a local authority foster parent. However, so far as is reasonably practicable, the local authority must also ensure that the placement allows the child to live near his or her home; is in the local authority's area; does not disrupt the child's education or training; enables the child to live with his or her siblings for whom the local authority is also providing accommodation; and is suited to the child's particular needs if he or she is disabled (section 22C(8) and (9)).

Figure 1 shows the distribution of children amongst the available placement options, from which it can be seen that, unsurprisingly, only 5 per cent of children are placed with their parents. By far the most common placement option is foster care, in which 75 per cent of looked-after children are placed (DfE/NS 2013a). Within this group however, only 8 per cent of all looked-after children are placed with family or friends (known as 'kinship care') (DfE/NS, 2013b), while 28 per cent of children are still placed outside the local authority area, although this may be for a variety of reasons, including at the child's request or in their perceived best interests. As at 31st March 2013, 150 looked-after young people were designated as missing, the whereabouts of 110 of whom were unknown to the local authority responsible for their care (DfE/NS, 2013a).



*including secure units, children's homes, hostels, care homes, residential schools and young offender institutions

Fig. 1: Placement of looked after children (DfE/NS, 2013a)(n = 68,110)

Placement stability remains a particular weakness of the English care system: care placements appear to be generally more stable in other European countries (Höjer et al., 2008). Across all forms of placement, in the year ending 31st March 2013, 66 per cent of looked-after children experienced only one placement, 23 per cent experienced two and 11 per cent (unchanged since 2009) were placed in three or more different homes or units in the course of the year (DfE/NS, 2013a). This is of particular concern because, coupled with high levels of social worker turnover, a dearth of stable and caring relationships in childhood is likely to exacerbate relationship difficulties resulting from children's experiences in their birth families. Biehal et al.'s study (2010) comparing outcomes for adopted children with those in long-term foster-care highlighted that emotional and behavioural difficulties are unlikely to improve until children are in stable, long-term placements.

Where children are placed in foster care, the carers must be approved and are remunerated by the local authority. The arrangements are governed by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Fostering Services – National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (HM Government, 2011). Nonetheless, research highlights a shortage of suitably qualified carers (Sinclair et al., 2007; Colton et al., 2008; Norgate, 2012) which, together with the high levels of vulnerability and behavioural difficulties of looked-after children; inadequate access to mental health services and education provision; and high social worker caseloads, contributes to placement instability (Norgate, 2012).

Regrettably, the situation appears to be no better for children in residential care placements. Following a series of sexual abuse scandals involving residential care homes in the 1980s (see e.g. Butler-Sloss, 1988 and Panel of Inquiry into the Circumstances Surrounding the Death of Jasmine Beckford, 1985), coupled with widespread acceptance that young children's attachment needs are such that placement in a family setting is far preferable to residential care (Smith, 2009), there has been a dramatic reduction in the use of residential placements for looked-after children in the last thirty years (Utting et al., 1997; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Bullock and Blower, 2013). Those institutions that remain care mostly for older looked-after children who are particularly troubled and/or vulnerable (Smith, 2009). They are mostly small institutions, with an average of six young people per home in the sample of sixteen institutions studied by David Berridge and others (Berridge et al., 2012). Although Berridge et al. found staff to

be committed and experienced and that homes no longer suffered the high staff turnover that has been problematic in the past, staff are nonetheless often poorly educated and paid, and are mostly women. In Berridge et al.'s sample, the average age of the children was 15½, most were late entrants into care, and the average length of stay was only ten months.

The vulnerability of the residential care population is demonstrated by a number of Berridge et al.'s findings, including that a third of placements ended due to disruption, three-quarters of which involved violence; over half went missing overnight; and 40 per cent were reported to police for an offence. Half of the young people leaving care during the study returned home. Most young people were generally complimentary about the homes, felt they were treated fairly in the main and were positive towards staff, but they were often wary of the other young people in the homes and conflict arose as young people competed for acceptance and status. Notwithstanding the young people's expressed satisfaction, the researchers considered that only about half of the homes provided a 'consistently warm and caring environment throughout the day and across the staff group' (page 60). Although young people felt well-supported by staff in relation to their education, during their accommodation just under a third were temporarily excluded from school, reflecting findings from earlier studies (e.g. Berridge and Brodie, 1998).

2.2.2.2 Contact with birth families

The Children Act 1989 section 34 significantly strengthened duties on local authorities to provide contact between looked-after children and their parents (Masson, 1990). The Act also imposes a general duty to 'endeavour to promote contact' with relatives, friends and others connected with the child unless it is not 'reasonably practical or consistent with [the child's] welfare' (Schedule 2, paragraph 15(1)). A court order is required for the refusal of contact with birth parents (section 34). Detailed consideration of the literature on contact with children in care is beyond the scope of this study, but in a review of the literature Sen and Broadhurst (2011) draw attention to a number of key findings. The first of these is that, as in this study, most children wish to remain in contact with their birth families, who are often the cause of considerable anxiety to them. The second concerns the potential impact of children's birth family relationships on stability of placement. Overall, high quality contact appears to be associated with stability of placement but other factors are more influential and

placement breakdown is more likely in cases where contact is problematic, poorly planned or unsupported, particularly for children with a history of maltreatment. Although s22C(8) requires that siblings should be placed together unless impracticable, this is not the case for as many as two-thirds of children and the literature highlights the potential dangers of children becoming embroiled in complex family dynamics (Sen and Broadhust, 2011). Statutory guidance[1] was updated with specific reference to the promotion of contact with siblings in February 2014 (Department for Education, 2014b).

2.2.3 *Diversity in vulnerability: the characteristics of looked-after children*

There were 68,110 looked-after children in England on 31st March 2013 (DfE/NS, 2013a), a rise of close to 15 per cent since 2008 (DfE/NS, 2012)[2]. Fifty-nine per cent were looked-after under a care order and 27 per cent were voluntarily accommodated, with a trend away from the latter in favour of the former in recent years. The remainder were subject to emergency protection arrangements, adoption placement orders or youth justice provisions. Figure 2 illustrates the family circumstances of looked-after children, showing that 91 per cent of children experienced abuse or neglect, family dysfunction or acute stress, or absent parenting.

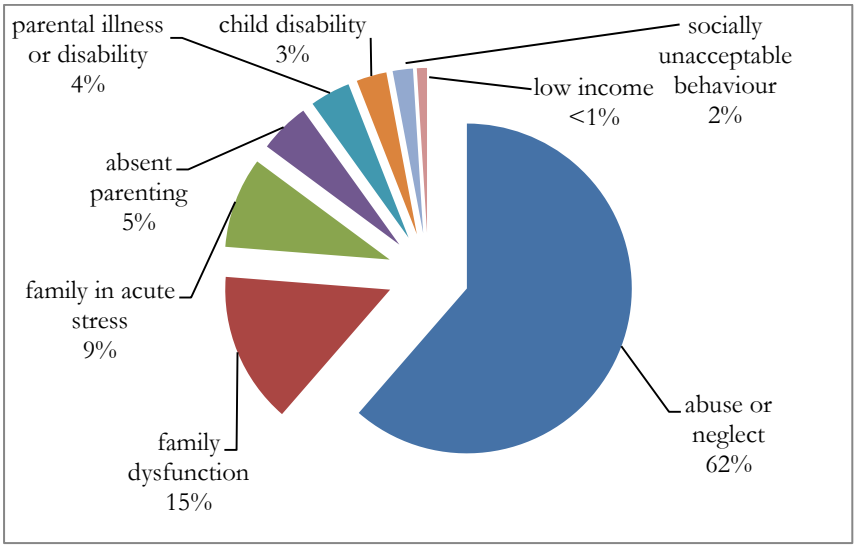


Fig. 2: Reasons for provision of looked after services to children looked after in England as at 31st March 2013 (from DfE/NS 2013a). N = 68,110

[1] Statutory guidance should be complied with by local authorities when exercising their functions, unless local circumstances indicate exceptional reasons that justify a variation.
[2] The death of Baby Peter Connelly in August 2007 precipitated a significant and sustained increase in the workload of the child protection system, from referrals to children in care.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that looked-after children appear to be at greater risk of mental health problems (Blower et al., 2004; Ford et al., 2007), suicide and self-harm (HM Government, 2012): Ford et al. (2007) estimate that fewer than one in ten have 'positively good' mental health (page 325). A review of evidence from England and France suggests that mental health problems are likely to be exacerbated during the transition from care to independent living (Stein and Dumaret, 2011): UN Guidelines on alternative care stress the importance of counselling and support during this transition period (United Nations General Assembly, 2010). In the year ending 31st March 2013, nearly 68 per cent of looked-after children for whom data were available were identified as having special educational needs (SEN), most commonly categorised as social, emotional and behavioural needs, including 28.5 per cent who held statements. These figures compare with just under 19 per cent of all children having special educational needs, including 2.8 per cent with a statement (DfE/NS, 2013c).

Fifty-six per cent of looked-after children were male at 31st March 2013 (DfE/NS, 2013a), a proportion that has remained fairly stable over recent years (DfE/NS, 2010a). The ethnic background of children looked after in England as at 31st March 2013 is shown at Figure 3 below. Black and 'mixed' ethnicity children tend to be over-represented at entry into care, while Asian children are often under-represented, and 'mixed' ethnicity children are likely to enter care earlier than others, but the reasons for this remain unclear (Owen & Statham, 2009).

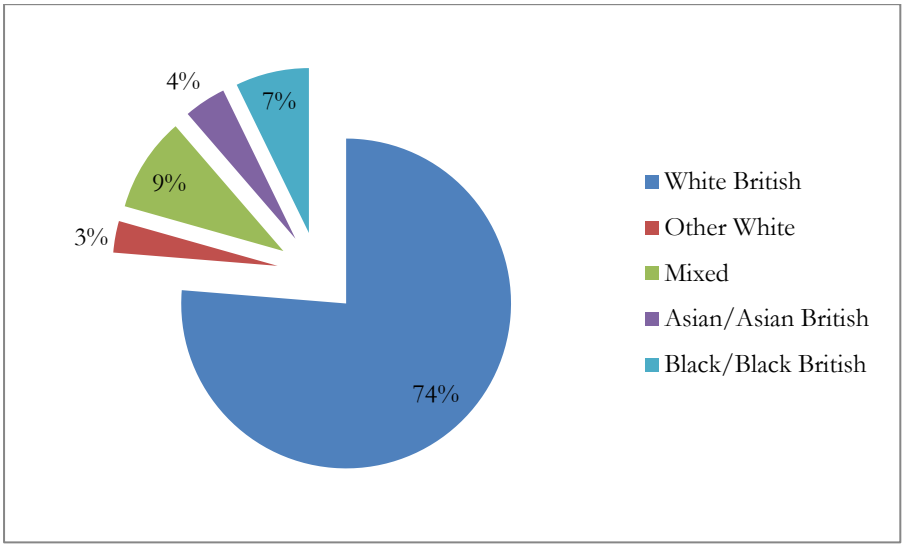


Fig. 3: Ethnicity of children looked after in England as at 31st March 2013 (from DfE/NS 2013a). N = 68,110

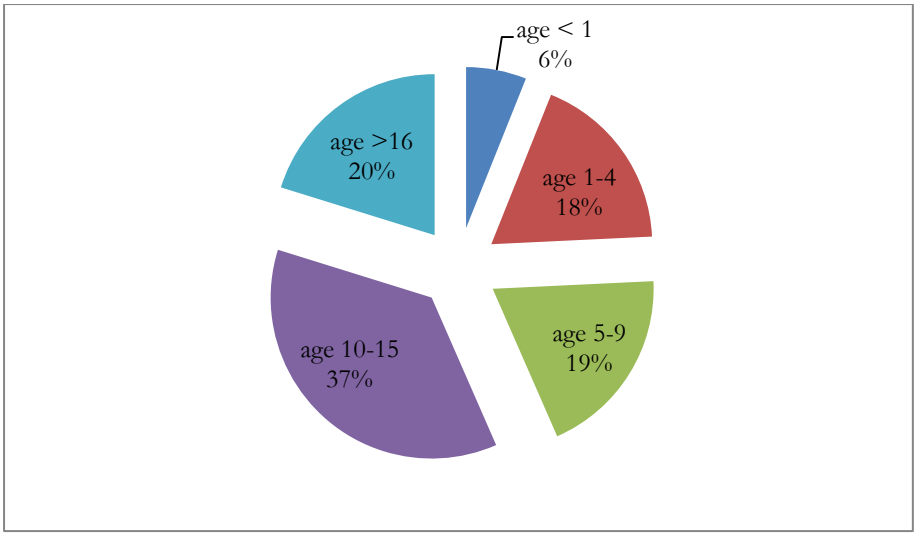


Fig. 4: Ages of children looked after in England as at 31st March 2013 (from DfE/NS 2013a). N=68,110

From Figure 4 it can be seen that there is a preponderance of older children in the looked-after population. This reflects two features of the child protection system: first, the fact that younger children will be made available for adoption where possible and second, the tendency for children to enter care quite late in their childhood, with 42 per cent entering at age ten or over in the year to 31st March 2013 (DfE/NS, 2013a). This is significant because late entrants into care are less likely to achieve improvements in tests for inhibited attachment, social development and on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Biehal et al., 2010) and likely to exhibit more problematic behaviour and perform less well at school than their peers who entered care at an earlier age (Sinclair et al., 2007).

It is also important to note for the purposes of this study the transitory nature of many children's encounters with the care system. During the year ending 31st March 2013, a total of 95,170 children were looked after at some time, with only 47,200 of those looked after at the census date of 31st March having been looked after continuously for at least 12 months (DfE/NS, 2013a). Moving in and out of state care creates instability in children's lives as well as introducing considerable challenges, both in terms of enabling the care system to impact positively on their lives, and for the assessment of any such impact on outcomes for the children it serves. Recent research on children returning home from care (Farmer and Lutman, 2010; Wade et al., 2010) suggests that reunification is unlikely to be successful for most maltreated children, with 65 per cent of the 138 neglected children in Farmer and Lutman's study who had returned home no

longer at home at the five year follow-up and only a third of the 68 maltreated children in Wade et al.'s study having remained continuously at home after four years. In both studies, there were negative implications for well-being and stability associated with a further breakdown of the placement at home and for many children, the exposure to further abuse and neglect in the home environment. Farmer and Lutman (2010) concluded that children aged over six when they returned home were less likely than younger children to achieve permanence in alternative care in the event that the return home failed. In contrast, recent research suggests that care improves outcomes for most children (Hannon et al., 2010; Wade et al., 2010). It is likely that this is due at least in part to support for children leaving care introduced since the turn of the century.

2.2.4 *Legislation and policy to support transition to adulthood*

Acknowledgement of the lack of support accorded to care leavers in comparison with that generally expected by young people cared for by their parents prompted a consultation document (Department of Health, 1999), which led in turn to specific legislative provision to extend the duties of local authorities to care leavers, including those over eighteen. In England and Wales, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 created a complex scheme of staged support according to the age and care history of the child or young person.[3] To qualify for leaving care services, a young person must be an 'eligible child', defined as a child who is aged sixteen or seventeen and has been looked after by the local authority for a period or periods amounting in total to thirteen weeks, which began after the child attained the age of fourteen and ended after his or her sixteenth birthday[4].

The local authority is required to carry out a needs assessment for each eligible child within three months of the child reaching the age of sixteen or becoming an eligible child (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 regulation 42) in order to determine the appropriate advice, assistance and support to be provided whilst the child is looked after and after he or she leaves care (Children Act 1989, Schedule 2, paragraph 19B(4)). The local authority is required to prepare a pathway plan (paragraph 19B(4) and defined in section 23E), which must be reviewed

[3] The situation in Scotland is rather different, being governed primarily by the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001.
[4] Schedule 2, paragraph 19B(2)(b) of the Children Act 1989 (supplemented by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 regulation 40).

regularly (paragraph 19B(5)), and to appoint a personal advisor for the child (paragraph 19C). The pathway plan must address the issues set out in Schedule 8 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, including plans for accommodation and education when the child leaves care; assistance in obtaining appropriate employment or other 'purposeful' activity; support in developing and sustaining relationships; development of practical skills for independent living; financial support for accommodation and maintenance costs; how the child's health care needs are to be met; and the local authority's contingency plan should the pathway plan not be implemented effectively.

Once an eligible child has left local authority care he or she becomes a 'relevant child' if aged sixteen or seventeen (Children Act 1989 section 23A) and a 'former relevant child' once he or she turns eighteen (section 23C). Children aged sixteen and seventeen (the primary focus of this study) may therefore be either looked-after children or care leavers and most will be transferred to the local authority Leaving Care team at or soon after the age of sixteen. Relevant children must also have a pathway plan and a personal advisor and the local authority has a duty to take reasonable steps to keep in contact with them, as well as to maintain them and provide them with suitable accommodation (section 23B).

Under sections 23C and 24B of the Children Act 1989, the local authority has continuing duties to 'former relevant children' in relation to keeping in touch (section 23C(2)), providing the assistance of a personal advisor and keeping the pathway plan under review (section 23C(3)). In general the duties owed under section 23 persist until the young person reaches the age of 21 (section 23C(6)), but the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 strengthened the duties owed by the local authority to young people continuing in education and training. The 2008 Act has amended the Children Act 1989 by extending the time during which young people continuing in education and training may be entitled to assistance from their former corporate parent to the age of 25 (Children Act 1989 section 23CA); requiring the local authority to provide assistance such as

> (a) contributing to expenses incurred by him in living near the place where he is, or will be, receiving education or training; or
> (b) making a grant to enable him to meet expenses connected with his education and training…

to the extent that his educational or training needs require it (s23CA(4) and (5));

and providing that young people attending higher education in accordance with their pathway plan are now entitled to a one-off bursary, currently a minimum of £2,000 (s23CA(5A))[5].

Although the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 are very welcome with regard to support for care leavers who continue in education or training, the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009: page 88) has pointed out that 'the terms on which this provision has been extended risk excluding some of the most vulnerable young people from continuing support'. Research has highlighted the value of higher education in facilitating a gradual transition to independent living (Stein, 2008) and young people who do not continue in further or higher education are likely to be more vulnerable in a range of ways than those who do, and may be less well-equipped for independence. The Government has, however, recently (after completion of fieldwork for this study) introduced a cross-departmental strategy for young people leaving care (HM Government, 2013a) which includes: measures to encourage local authorities to increase care leavers' allowance for setting up home to £2,000; a charter for care leavers; a 'junior independent savings account' for care leavers, to which it contributes £200; enhanced statistical data collection in relation to the education and employment of care leavers; and increased prominence for outcomes for care leavers in the Ofsted social care inspection regime.

The most recent changes have attempted to tackle the early age at which care leavers move to live independently. USA research on the operation of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act 2008 suggests that the benefits of allowing care leavers to remain in placement later more than justify the cost (Peter et al., 2009). In England, in the year ending 31st March 2013, 37 per cent of nineteen year-olds who were in care at sixteen were living independently, down from 43 per cent in 2009 (DfE/NS, 2013a). Only 5 per cent were still with their former foster carers; 3 per cent were in custody; and 13 per cent had returned to live with parents or relatives. The

[5] There is also provision under the statutory scheme for young people who were looked after from the age of sixteen or seventeen but who do not qualify as former relevant children to access advice and support, including assistance with expenses connected with his or her education or training, up to the age of 21, or 25 if they continue in education or training (ss24-24C). This assistance may include the provision of vacation accommodation for young people in full-time further or higher education (s24B(5)).

remainder were in a range of temporary accommodation, including foyers (similar to hostels), semi-independent or transitional housing, supported or ordinary lodgings and community homes.

Findings from a pilot study instituted to assess the benefits of allowing care leavers to remain in their placement until the age of 21 (Munro et al., 2012) suggest that it was broadly successful in enabling young people to exercise greater control over their transition to independent living and facilitating their engagement in education, employment and training through the creation of more normative transitions. It should be noted that four of the six local authorities participating in the in-depth aspects of the study required young people to 'be in (or actively demonstrating a commitment to being in)' education, employment or training (page 28) and that only young people who enjoyed 'established 'familial relationships" (page 6) with their foster carers were included. In response to the pilot, section 98 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (which came into force on 13th May 2014 and is set out in Appendix 1.1) amends the Children Act 1989 through the insertion of section 23CZA and Schedule II paragraph 19BA. These provisions place a duty on local authorities to consider the appropriateness of 'staying put arrangements' for eligible children (in the pathway plan) if carers and children wish to enter into them, and to provide support for such arrangements for former relevant children (including specifically through financial support to foster carers) until they reach 21, unless the local authority considers the arrangements would not be consistent with the former relevant child's welfare[6]. The House of Commons Education Committee (2014) has, however, called for the extension of the scheme to children in residential care homes as well as improved regulation of accommodation for care leavers, including an outright ban on bed and breakfast accommodation.

2.3 **The education of looked-after children**

2.3.1 ***The 'attainment gap'***

The low educational attainment of looked-after children in relation to all children has been a matter of concern internationally for some years (Stein, 2008): the YiPPEE (Young People in Public Care: Pathways to Education in Europe) project, for example,

[6] See also the Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers Regulations and Guidance 2010; the Fostering Regulations and Guidance 2011; and the Staying Put Guidance 2013.

found a similar pattern of underachievement in all five of the participating European countries (Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden and the UK) (Höjer et al., 2008; Cameron et al., 2012). To date, public care systems in Europe have not enabled most children to make up the deficit arising from their earlier experiences (Höjer et al., 2008).

Although the phenomenon was noted by researchers in the UK as long ago as the 1960s (Harker et al., 2004), systematic data were not collected at national level until 1999 and policy initiatives directly targeting this issue date from the *Quality Protects* initiative in 1998 (Berridge et al., 2008). In England, in the year ending 31st March 2013, 58 per cent of all children in Year 11 achieved at least 5 GCSEs or equivalent at A*-C including Maths and English, but only 15.3 per cent of looked-after children did so (DfE/NS, 2013c). These figures do, however, represent a slight narrowing of the attainment gap in the last two years. In 2010, 27 per cent of children in Year 11 who had been looked after continually for at least a year previously did not obtain even one GCSE or equivalent qualification, compared with just one per cent of all children in Year 11 (DfE/NS, 2010b). The Government appears no longer to collect this latter data, suggesting a political focus on average or better attainment, rather than on young people at greatest risk of social exclusion, a trend the effects of which I will argue is evident from the findings of this study.

It should also be noted that the attainment gap is greater for this older group of children than it is in lower year groups, but that this in itself should not be regarded as reflecting a failure in the care system. Rather, due to the transitory nature of children's encounters with care coupled with the late entry into care of many children, those who are looked after in Year 11 at school comprise a rather different cohort than looked-after children at Key Stage 1 and 2. For example, most UASC will enter care over the age of fourteen. Although many are highly motivated to achieve (Jackson et al., 2005; Sirriyeh & Wade, 2013), and often make good progress (Cameron et al., 2012; Sirriyeh and Wade, 2013), many start school in this country with little English and limited prior education.

Initially the disadvantaged backgrounds of most looked-after children were regarded as the primary underlying factor accounting for their poor educational outcomes (Harker et al., 2004) and Sonia Jackson is widely credited with drawing attention to the inadequacies of the care system in meeting the educational needs of looked-after

children (see Jackson, 1987). The diversity of the care population is such that the underlying causes of children's educational difficulties are many and challenging. There is now recognition that both children's pre-care and in-care experiences must be taken into consideration in evaluating young people's educational outcomes, which may account for the apparent stubbornness of the issue in responding to the legislative and policy interventions outlined later in this chapter.

2.3.2 *Explanations for the attainment gap*

In acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities of children entering the care system, Berridge et al. (2008) somewhat controversially conclude that a substantial reduction in the 'attainment gap' is unlikely and suggest that reference to 'underachievement' should be replaced by the term 'low achievement' in relation to this cohort. In addition to the higher incidence in this population of mental health problems and special educational needs, looked-after children commonly come from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage (St Claire and Osborn, 1987; Bebbington and Miles, 1989). There is a wealth of research evidence of an association between low socio-economic status and poor educational attainment, including from large scale longitudinal studies such as *School Matters*, (Sammons, 1995), and some evidence that the relationship is a causal one (Blandon and Gregg, 2004). However, in relation to looked-after children, controlling for socio-economic disadvantage reduces, but does not entirely eradicate, the association between care status and low educational attainment (Cheung and Heath, 1994).

It is simplistic and disingenuous to blame the care system for poor educational outcomes in a group of children whose entry into care generally results from a range of factors in themselves associated with low educational attainment (Berridge, 2007; Berridge et al., 2008; Hannon et al., 2010). Nonetheless, Alan Johnson, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, concluded in 2006 that 'the care system seems all too often to reinforce early disadvantage, rather than helping children to successfully overcome it' (Department for Education and Skills, 2006: page 3). The state has a responsibility to improve the life chances of highly disadvantaged children in respect of whom it has taken on the role of parent, but research in this area has highlighted a wide range of deficiencies in relation to corporate parenting. These include capacity, turnover, leadership and resourcing issues in children's social care; failures in joint

working among professionals; and instability in children's lives in care (Ofsted/SSI, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit (SEU), 2003; Hibbert, 2006; Jackson and Simon, 2006; Berridge, 2007). Placement changes often entail disruption to children's education and a recent study following 187 children from two local authorities from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3 identified placement instability as particularly detrimental to children's educational progress (O'Sullivan et al., 2013).

Poor educational attainment has also been blamed in part on teachers' low expectations of looked-after children (Ofsted/SSI, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Education has not always been regarded as a priority by social workers either, or adequately supported by carers, who may be poorly equipped to do so (Hibbert, 2006; Jackson and Simon, 2006; Berridge, 2007). Educational progress is affected in accordance with the severity of young people's emotional and behavioural difficulties (Biehal et al., 2009), but insufficient attention is paid to children's emotional, mental and physical health needs (Blower et al., 2004; Ford et al., 2007). In a review of the literature on the education of children in care, Penelope Welbourne and Caroline Leeson conclude that the provision of additional educational support is only likely to benefit children significantly if combined with appropriate therapeutic support, including specialist assessment of children's educational needs (Welbourne and Leeson, 2013).

Fletcher-Campbell and Archer (2003) studied the reasons for the poor attainment of looked-after children at Key Stage 4, using data from twelve local authorities and seven case studies. Their findings highlighted the use of inappropriate educational placements which denied young people the opportunity to gain suitable qualifications, the importance of stability of care and educational placements, and the effect of unmet special educational needs on care placements.

Research has also demonstrated that educational outcomes for looked-after children can be improved: key factors include high expectations and individually-tailored learning; stability of placement and education; a consistent caring adult; encouragement of birth parents; strong commitment and help with schooling from foster carers; strengths-based assessment and educational support; identification and treatment of mental health issues; and being in care longer (Aldgate et al., 1992; Ajayi and Quigley, 2006; Connelly et al., 2008; Stein, 2008; Pecora, 2012). In general, entry to care below the age of twelve has a positive impact in terms of children's educational attainment (McClung and Gayle,

2010). Some highly motivated care leavers have accessed, and succeeded in, higher education (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley 2005; Ajayi and Quigley 2006; Jackson and Ajayi 2007; Stein, 2008). The factors enabling them to do so are considered in the following section.

2.3.3 *Entry to further and higher education*

Academic achievement has been identified as a key factor in determining adult success and well-being in relation to fostered children in the US (Pecora et al., 2006) as well as children growing up in care in the UK (Jackson and Martin, 1998). It is not clear how the aspirations of looked-after young people compare with those of their peers: a small-scale government survey (Department for Education, 2010a) concludes that as a cohort, looked-after children have the same aspirations as others, but the 32 young people in the English YiPPEE case study (Cameron et al., 2011) demonstrated somewhat modest and general aspirations. Tendencies to prioritise care leavers' immediate self-sufficiency over their longer term educational and career goals (Jackson and Cameron, 2012), including through assuming that vocational rather than academic routes are more appropriate (Jackson, 2010), must be addressed. It is imperative that attention be paid to opportunities for young people to enhance their academic qualifications beyond Key Stage 4: research suggests that with appropriate support young people may be able to make up considerable ground at Key Stage 5 (Driscoll, 2011), but that many are forced to follow atypical and often prolonged paths in order to do so (Cameron et al., 2011; Driscoll, 2011). Although young people are now required to remain in education and/or training until the age of eighteen, constrained financial circumstances (Allen, 2003; Wade and Dixon, 2006; Driscoll, 2013a), reduced support, and greater social demands and increased independence in college compared with school (Driscoll, 2013b) lead to some care leavers dropping out of further education.

Some modest progress appears to have been made following the introduction of leaving care services as set out above, demonstrated by a rise from 5 per cent of care leavers aged 19 in higher education in 2004 in England (DCSF/NS, 2008) to 6 per cent in 2013 (DfE/NS 2013a) and an increase in the number in education other than higher education from 18 per cent to 28 per cent over the same period. The UK initial higher education participation rate for 17-30 year-olds for 2011-12 was 49 per cent (DBIS/NS, 2013). There is little research in this area in comparable countries, but the findings of

the YiPPEE project confirm that there are similar barriers to higher education for young people ageing out of state care in other countries in Europe (Cameron et al., 2012).

The YiPPEE project included interviews with a total of 170 young people aged eighteen to 24 who had been in care at age sixteen in the five participating countries and who had shown a level of educational achievement and commitment at that age. The study found that young people from all the countries shared similar family backgrounds and pre-care experiences and in all countries there was a large gap in the educational attainment and participation of children in care compared with their peers. Other common experiences for these young people included the likelihood of experiencing disruption and delay in their education, leaving care much earlier than their peers left home, and low priority being accorded to their education by social workers and carers (Jackson and Cameron, 2012). England is, however, the only one of these five countries to have paid significant attention to the participation of care leavers in higher education through specific policy and legislation providing care leavers with access to professional advice and financial support (Cameron et al., 2012).

Important factors for improved educational attainment and post-compulsory participation gleaned from the YiPPEE literature review were financial support to engage in further or higher education and high expectations by social workers (Höjer et al., 2008), together with the personal encouragement of one caring and supportive adult such as a teacher, foster carer or mentor, endorsing findings from other studies that successful care leavers were supported by at least one close relationship with an encouraging adult (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Pecora, 2012). Interviews with professionals as well as with young people elicited the additional importance of strong personal motivation and settled accommodation. These findings are broadly consistent with those of the researchers in the *By Degrees* study, although that study highlighted the importance of foster carers who regarded engagement with the child's education as a central aspect of their role and also found that the support and encouragement of birth parents was a significant factor associated with university entry (Jackson et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2005). It should be noted however, that a significant proportion of the 129 care leavers entering university in that study were former UASC, whose experience of parenting is also likely to be very different from that of UK-born looked-after children (Ajayi and Quigley, 2006). In some other studies, the influence of birth parents

has been found to be potentially negative, including where parents appear to lack interest in or understanding of young people's educational aspirations; where the family remains dysfunctional; or where young people regard their birth family as predominantly a source of stress (Geenen and Powers, 2007; Driscoll, 2013a). The *By Degrees* study also found that UASC were more likely to come from home backgrounds in which parents had university degrees and education was highly valued, in contrast to the experiences of their UK-born peers (Ajayi and Quigley, 2006).

Barriers to improving particiaption in further and higher education identified by professionals from the YiPPEE study included the separation of education and care in professional disciplines and the tendency for immediate self-sufficiency to be given priority over young people's educational aspirations (Jackson and Cameron, 2012). The research identified the need for carers and social workers to place much greater importance on educational progress; for schools to demonstrate a more understanding response to the effects of young people's experiences on their engagement in school; and for the use of multi-professional teams including well-qualified teachers and career advisors to support young people's educational transitions.

2.3.4 ***Initiatives to support the education of looked-after children***

The last decade has seen considerable legislative activity directed towards improving the educational outcomes of looked-after children, with a particular emphasis upon narrowing the attainment gap between children in state care and their peers. New Labour tackled the issue as part of its social inclusion agenda, and in 2003 the Social Exclusion Unit published *A Better Education for Children in Care* (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), in which revised Public Service Agreement targets were set, including a target to narrow substantially the gap between the educational attainment and participation of looked-after children and that of their peers. Additionally, the Children Act 2004 section 52 amended the Children Act 1989 through the insertion of section 22(3A), which specifies explicitly that the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in their care includes a particular duty to promote the child's educational achievement. As this duty applies to looked-after children, it includes eligible children (that is, those aged sixteen or seventeen who are still in local authority care) but not relevant children (who are also sixteen or seventeen but have left care), nor young people over eighteen. Looked-after children must be given the highest

priority in arrangements for admission to maintained schools under the School Admissions Code (Department for Education, 2012a); academies may be granted dispensation from this requirement by the Secretary of State for Education where there is 'demonstrable need' (Department for Education 2012a, paragraph 4). Disruption of a child's education as a result of care placement changes should be avoided wherever possible during Key Stage 4 and must be approved by the local authority virtual school head (Department for Education, 2012a; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, Regulation 10). These provisions appear weaker than those under the previous School Admissions (Admission Arrangements) (England) Regulations of 2008 and the statutory guidance published by the previous government in 2010 (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010b) in the absence of specific provision for out-of-cycle admissions; the absence of specific reference to educational disruption other than at Key Stage 4; and the more flexible position of academies, although the new provisions stress an expectation that looked-after children should attend schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

Section 99 of the Children and Families Act 2014 (amending the Children Act 1989 s22) requires local authorities to appoint at least one person employed by that authority or another local authority in England for the purpose of discharging the duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. This post is referred to in statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2014c) as the virtual school head. Previous guidance issued in the form of the 'Virtual School Head Toolkit' (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2010b: page 4) advised that

> The virtual school head role should be undertaken by a person with substantial, current or previous senior level experience of supporting vulnerable children in educational settings, preferably including experience of school senior leadership. The post should be at Head of Service or Assistant Head of Service level and have direct links with the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services. It is recommended that the virtual school head role is integrated with that of the Looked After Children Education Service to form the virtual school.

This guidance has been archived and the emphasis on the seniority of the virtual school head is absent from the new statutory guidance for local authorities issued in July 2014 (Department for Education, 2014c). This places overall responsibility for fulfilment of the statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children on

Children's Services Directors and Lead Members. The virtual head is described as 'the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of the authority's looked-after children, including those placed out-of-authority' (paragraph 3). Although the new guidance stresses the importance of involving children in decisions and encouraging high expectations of children by social workers and carers, twenty school days are allowed for allocation of a school placement in the case of an emergency. Head teachers are advised that they should 'so far as possible' avoid excluding looked-after children. This compares with non-statutory guidance under the previous administration describing the exclusion of looked-after children as an 'absolute last resort' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008: paragraph 78). The effects of exclusion on these children can be catastrophic, because of the interdependence of school and placement stability, and the central role that school may play in promoting resilient adaptation and a providing a 'normalising' environment (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Newman, 2004; Cameron, 2007 and see section 3.3.3). In 2011-12, looked-after children were more than twice as likely to be permanently excluded than their peers and nearly three times as likely to face fixed-term exclusion, rates that have improved significantly since 2008-09 (DfE/NS, 2013c).

An evaluation of the virtual school model in eleven pilot authorities concluded that virtual schools were successful in prioritising the education of looked-after children (Berridge et al., 2009). Ofsted (2011) has also found the virtual school a potentially strong model to drive improvement, although some virtual schools do not currently support children beyond the age of sixteen (Ofsted, 2012a). The engagement of corporate parents in the education of looked-after children was found to be varied in Ofsted's analysis of nine local authorities (Ofsted 2012a). Effective virtual schools were identified as those which supported schools in the best use of personal education plans, early intervention, managing young people's attendance and engagement in education, and assisting individual children with specific difficulties such as negotiating the transition from primary to secondary school. They challenged schools to raise the profile of looked-after children and encourage high expectations of them; and encouraged schools to support other professionals, including foster carers (Ofsted, 2011). Virtual schools appear to be associated with increased attendance and reduced exclusion among looked-after children and increased understanding of educational matters among other professionals, and can ensure that educational issues are core to

care planning and review (Ofsted 2012a). Virtual heads considered, however, that there are still challenges in raising expectations of looked-after children in some schools and in supporting children placed outside the local authority (Ofsted 2012a). Local authorities identified as having less effective virtual schools tended to be less successful in co-ordinating joint working to support young people at risk of exclusion, often compounded by a limited variety of education placements (Ofsted 2011). The seniority and professional expertise of virtual heads was valued by schools, carers and professionals (Ofsted, 2012a). It is as yet unclear what effect the changes set out above and the increasing number of academies and free schools with greater independence from local authority control will have on the work of virtual schools or on the education of looked-after children attending those schools.

A key aspect of the virtual head role comprises advising and supporting designated teachers for looked-after children, who hold the primary responsibility for promoting the educational attainment of looked-after children within schools. Some local authorities introduced designated teachers for looked-after children in response to a joint circular issued in 1994 (DFE/DoH, 1994) and the role was recommended as best practice in 2000 (DfEE/DoH, 2000). By 2007, 61 per cent of primary schools and 72 per cent of secondary schools had a designated teacher for looked-after children (Lewis et al., 2007). The role was placed on a statutory footing through the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 section 20, following recommendations in the White Paper *Care Matters: Time for Change* (Department for Education and Skills, 2007). From 1st September 2009, school governing bodies have been required to appoint a designated teacher and to ensure that they undertake appropriate training. Statutory guidance for England states that 'the designated teacher should have lead responsibility for helping school staff understand the things which affect how looked-after children learn and achieve', including promotion of 'a culture of high expectations and aspirations'; ensuring young people are involved in setting learning targets; and ensuring that carers 'understand the importance of supporting learning at home' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009: page 5). The designated teacher is also required to undertake a key role in enabling children to make a smooth transition to a new school or college and to manage engagement with relevant people and agencies outside the school, including carers, social workers and the local authority virtual school.

The consequence of the relatively small numbers of looked-after children, coupled with the diversity of their experiences and needs (Rutter, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008), is that numbers of looked-after children in any individual school are likely to be low and teachers may be inexperienced in managing the particular challenges presented by looked-after children. To date, there has been little evaluation of the role of designated teachers (Berridge et al., 2008). The research undertaken suggests that although most designated teachers are keen to focus support on individual looked-after children, and welcome input from social workers to help them to do so, some were not consulted in advance about taking on the role (Hayden, 2005), while none of the ten designated teachers in Hayden's study were given additional time or resources to fulfil their role. In a study by Barnardo's (Hibbert, 2006), 55 of the 61 children in care surveyed were unaware that their school should have a designated teacher for looked-after children, while over half of the children in Harker and others' study (Harker et al., 2004) had no knowledge of the role, and few were able to identify their designated teacher. Some young people appreciated the support of the designated teacher but a reluctance to be singled out could limit the extent to which young people would engage with them (Harker et al., 2004). Fletcher-Campbell (2008) concluded that the different facets of the designated teacher role may be best undertaken by more than one individual and that looked-after children need individually-tailored plans and a flexible approach to their negotiation of an education system that operates to established norms of progress.

In addition to the legislative provisions set out in 2.2.4 above, care leavers are entitled to the 16-19 bursary and to the Pupil Premium. Preliminary analysis suggests that replacement of the Educational Maintenance Allowance by the 16-19 bursary has overall had a negative effect on participation (Britton et al., 2014). The pupil premium entitlement for looked-after children will be increased to £1,900 for the year 2014-15 and will be paid to the local authority virtual school head (Department for Education, 2014d), addressing criticism that previous allocation to schools did not ensure that the money was spent directly on the pupils for whom it was intended (Ofsted, 2012b). Provision of one-to-one tuition was valued by looked-after children (Ofsted, 2012a) but has not been replaced.

There have also been attempts in the UK to improve the accessibility of and support in further and higher education for care leavers, led largely by Buttle UK, which has introduced a Quality Mark for institutions that demonstrate a robust strategy for the

support of this group of young people, from initiatives to raise aspirations; out-reach work; and support at application, entry and induction, through to support during their studies. However, an analysis of university access agreements found a lack of data about recruitment and retention of care leavers and suggested that the most prestigious universities were the least likely to provide support for care leavers (The Who Cares? Trust, 2012).

Extending compulsory engagement in education and/or training to the age of eighteen should provide an opportunity to focus on the needs of young people who have not fulfilled their academic potential at Key Stage 4. Since September 2103, students who have not attained maths and English GCSE at grades A*-C in Year 11 have been required to continue studying towards them in their 16-19 programme of study and from 2014, this is a condition of funding (Hancock, 2014). New 'trailblazing' apprenticeship guidance also requires that young people obtain level 1 maths and English qualifications as part of their apprenticeship (HM Government, 2014). The 'apprenticeship offer' under section 69 of the Education Act 2011, like its predecessor, is open not only to all young people aged sixteen to eighteen, but also to care leavers aged nineteen to 24 who give notice to the local authority of their intention to pursue education or training before the age of 21, giving recognition to the delayed progress of many such young people (see Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 section 83A(5)).

2.4 **Outcomes for care leavers**

It is too early to assess the impact of the most recent initiatives, but research concludes that care leavers still 'generally experience deplorable life outcomes' (Lonne et al., 2009, page 173). These are well documented and include higher rates of depression and anxiety, poverty and homelessness than their peers (Utting, 1997; Wade and Dixon, 2006; Berridge, 2007). One fifth of young people at Centrepoint in 2010 were care leavers (Centrepoint, 2010) and a quarter of the 261 single homeless people surveyed by Crisis in 2011 had been in local authority care (Reeve and Batty, 2011). It is estimated that around 70 per cent of sex workers have been in care (Centre for Social Justice, 2013). One older study found that half of young women became mothers within two years of leaving care (Biehal et al., 1995). Care leavers also have a greater likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system. Of the 942 young men and fifteen young

women aged fifteen to eighteen from eight male and three female establishments in the juvenile secure estate surveyed in 2012-13, a third of the young men and two thirds of the young women (nine) had spent time in care (Kennedy, 2013). Adult prisoners with a care background are likely to have been arrested for the first time at a younger age and are more likely to be reconvicted after their release (Williams et al., 2012).

Young people in general have disproportionately taken the brunt of the economic crisis in terms of unemployment (Wales, 2014). The generally poor educational attainment of care leavers renders them especially vulnerable to unemployment in the current economic climate, with 29 per cent of care leavers in England not in education, employment or training (NEET) at the age of nineteen for reasons other than illness or disability (which account for an additional 8 per cent), excluding the 8 per cent whose local authority had lost touch with them (DfE/NS, 2013b). It is difficult to compare these figures directly with the general population, because the statistics cover different age categories. Statistics for the first quarter of 2014 show that the proportion of sixteen to eighteen year-olds who were NEET fell in 2013 to 7.6 per cent (DfE/NS, 2014b), although these figures hide broader issues of underemployment, both in terms of working hours and the nature of young people's jobs (Gardiner, 2014). It is yet to be seen to what extent young people will be able to take advantage of the nascent economic recovery, but for care leavers, educational transitions at sixteen to eighteen coincide with disruption in other areas of their lives, including transition to the leaving care team and for many, moving to live independently. Young people in Year 11 are therefore often preoccupied with planning for leaving care, aggravating the stress of preparing for GCSEs (Fletcher-Campbell, 2008; Driscoll, 2013b). Poor performance at Key Stage 4 compared with their peers (DfE/NS, 2013c) creates barriers to further and higher education and skilled work for care leavers and contributes to the high risk of social exclusion in adulthood faced by this group (Stein, 2006a, Jackson, 2007).

2.5 **The Context of the Study**

From the legislation and literature I have discussed in this chapter, it is apparent that there has been considerable attention paid by policy-makers to the educational attainment of looked-after children as well as to the support of care leavers since the turn of the century. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, Children and Young Persons Act 2008, and the Children and Families Act 2014, and their associated

regulations and guidance, have increased the support that it is incumbent upon corporate parents and schools to provide for this group of children and young people. Despite this plethora of policy initiatives however, in 2010, as I started work on this study, Jackson described the progress in improving educational outcomes for looked-after children in the previous twenty years as 'disappointingly slow' (2010: page 57), pointing out that the variability of performance between local authorities suggests that much more could be done (Jackson, 2010). She concluded that 'most of the underlying problems identified by the Social Exclusion Unit…continue to blight the educational chances of looked-after children' (Jackson, 2010: page 57).

The majority of the existing research on the education of looked-after children focuses on children up to the age of sixteen, although researchers (Jackson et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2005; Ajayi and Quigley, 2006) have followed some of the small proportion of care leavers entering higher education through their degree courses, as noted in section 2.3.3. Less attention has been paid to whether, and if so how, looked-after young people finishing Key Stage 4 with disappointing qualifications can be supported to make up any educational deficit. This may be a reflection of what Jackson (2010: page 56) has called a 'strong, and damaging, assumption' that level 2 qualifications represent the highest attainment to which looked-after children can aspire, which is also reflected in the fact that there remains no government target for attainment beyond Year 11. These circumstances underpin the first of the four research objectives of this study, namely to explore the key barriers to academic progress for looked-after young people at and beyond Key Stage 4 and how looked-after young people experience and navigate these barriers.

Jackson (2010) also concluded that deficiencies in the care system militate against educational success for this cohort, and the interdependence of care and educational stability and experiences have been considered in this chapter. Recent years have seen local authorities under increasing pressure as a result of the combination of continuing child protection scandals resulting in heavier case loads and more children in care, and budgetary restraints arising from the Government's 'austerity measures'. The second objective of this study is therefore to consider the interdependence of young people's experiences in and before entering care and their educational outcomes, in order better to understand the most effective means by which young people may be supported to reach their educational potential.

The third objective, to assess the effectiveness of the virtual school head and designated teacher roles in promoting the engagement and progress of looked-after young people in further education and their participation in higher education, reflects recent changes in the means by which educational support is afforded to looked-after children. Although there is now a significant body of research on the education of looked-after children, the dearth of research evidence in relation to designated teachers reflects a wider lack of research in relation to the role of *schools* in the lives of this group (Berridge et al., 2008). This is a significant gap, given that teachers are the adults most commonly cited as being supportive of their education by looked-after children (Harker et al., 2004) and the importance of school in the lives of looked-after children. The introduction of virtual school heads on a statutory basis under the Children and Families Act 2014 also merits further research attention to this role.

Wider educational reforms are not only changing the qualifications landscape for all young people but also resulting in many more schools gaining greater independence from local authorities. This may be of particular import for the effectiveness of the virtual school head model. Moreover, continuing challenging economic circumstances, together with the requirement for young people in England to remain in education and/or training until they are eighteen (Education and Skills Act 2008, Part 1 and Education Act 2011, section 74), increase the importance of attention to the most appropriate ways by which older children in state care can be encouraged and supported to participate in further and higher education and training. The final objective therefore enables a more general examination of the current legislative and policy environment in the light of the findings from the study.

These four objectives contribute to the overarching aim of the study, namely to explore how looked-after young people experience educational transitions in Years 11-13 and how young people transitioning out of care might best be supported to fulfil their educational potential. Findings from the pilot study on the importance of relationships in young people's lives; consideration of the particular importance of young people's own perspectives and decisions as they approach adulthood, and their sense of self-reliance; together with my own interest in children's rights, influenced the theoretical frameworks which I chose to inform my analysis. In the following chapter I explain the choice of the three theoretical frameworks which I have employed and consider their potential contribution to work in this field.

Chapter 3
Theoretical frameworks

3.1 Introduction

This study is concerned with the short but eventful time in young people's lives from preparing for their first nationally-recognised qualifications to attaining legal adulthood. As a children's rights advocate, this period from fifteen to eighteen is of particular interest to me, because of the difficulty in reconciling children's wide range of developmental trajectories and opportunities for gaining skills and competence with the tendency for fixed expectations and entitlements to be imposed by the law.[7] Modern western society faces a paradox in which most young people are arguably not yet equipped to live independently at the age of eighteen and yet in some respects adolescents have been accorded greater freedom over decisions affecting them than has been the case historically. This paradox has recently been at the forefront of attention in child protection practice, for example in sexual exploitation cases in which professionals declined to intervene in part because very vulnerable young people were perceived to have been exercising autonomous choice (e.g. Rochdale Borough Safeguarding Children Board, 2013; Jay, 2014). Concerns have been expressed that professionals need to make greater use of developmental perspectives in work with young people (Rees et al., 2010) and that older adolescents with a long history of maltreatment tend to suffer 'agency neglect' (Brandon et al., 2008), not only because they are 'hard to help' but also because age rather than competence may be used as a reason not to impose services.

Concurrently, the recent raising of the age of compulsory engagement in education and training, and the legislative provisions set out in Chapter 2 to provide greater support to care leavers over the age of eighteen, provide examples of the state acting to extend the age to which young people must or may retain a state of some dependency. These examples not only illustrate the blurred and shifting boundary between childhood and adulthood but also evidence the fact that this boundary may be differently constructed in different domains of young people's lives and that the factors influencing such

[7] Some of these tensions surfaced in this study in the process of gaining ethical approval. Although there is not space to discuss them in full in this thesis, an article on the issues arising has been published separately (Driscoll, 2012).

decisions are often politically and socially determined, rather than being grounded in understanding of children's development and competence (Minow, 1986). Arguably, this state of affairs persists at least in part because theorisation of children's rights remains underdeveloped (Ferguson, 2013). The distinction between children's rights *qua* children and children's human rights becomes most significant at the cusp of adulthood, and is of greatest import for the most vulnerable young people.

These issues are therefore especially pertinent to care leavers, for whom the state exercises a parental role. For the reasons set out above, I wanted to ensure that this study was grounded in a developmental perspective of adolescence as a distinct and important life-phase and to use that understanding in undertaking a rights-based analysis of the entitlements of, and support offered to, care leavers in their transition to independent adulthood. In this chapter I first set out a brief account of how young people experience adolescence in contemporary economic and social conditions and basic psychological understandings of the developmental tasks faced by all adolescents, to set the particular circumstances of care leavers within the context of modern adolescence. I have drawn primarily on Coleman's focal model of adolescence because it seems best suited to enhancing understanding of how the multiple concurrent challenges and transitions that are faced by young people ageing out of care render this group uniquely vulnerable at this stage of their lives.

Next I consider resilience theory and the 'coping' literature, because they have been developed in order to explain the factors in young people's lives which may serve to promote positive adaptation notwithstanding significant adversity. Adolescence can be a time when emotional and behavioural problems (Biehal, 2005) and mental health issues (Meltzer et al., 2000) emerge, or a time during which young people experience positive 'turning points' (Masten et al., 2004). The concept of resilience can aid our understanding of the wide variation in outcomes for looked-after children and inform development of effective support; resilience is the theoretical construct most commonly used in the literature on looked-after children to elucidate the factors in young people's lives associated with both negative and positive outcomes. It is also particularly well-suited to this study because educational success is associated with resilient adaptation. The notion of self-reliance (Cameron, 2007) (a strong theme arising from the pilot study: see Chapter 4) helps to illuminate the difficulties many care leavers face in seeking and accepting help from professionals and in making supportive relationships

with consistent adults in their lives. I draw on Stein's categorisation of care leavers according to indicators of resilient adaptation later in the thesis to illuminate the life circumstances of young people at the end of the fieldwork and consider their likely life trajectories in young adulthood.

Finally, I examine the empirical insights drawn from the focal theory of adolescence and resilience theory in the context of a children's rights perspective, in order to contribute to development of a theoretical and legal justification for the imposition of additional duties on the state towards care leavers. I consider the significance of similarities between the factors identified in the resilience literature that facilitate successful adaptation and theoretical accounts of the development of the skills required for the exercise of autonomy in adulthood. I draw on notions of 'reparatory' and 'assumed' responsibility (Hollingsworth, 2013a) to justify the imposition of particular duties owed by corporate parents to care leavers. I utilize Hollingsworth's concept of 'foundational rights' (Hollingsworth, 2013b) as a means of establishing what those duties should entail in terms of enabling young people to attain the necessary capacities to exercise what Hollingsworth designates 'full' autonomy. The concept of foundational rights incorporates consideration not only of concrete capabilities such as educational attainment but also of relational aspects of autonomy. It can therefore contribute to an understanding of what young people need in order to be prepared to exercise genuine or 'full' autonomy in adulthood which incorporates recognition of the interdependence of young people's experiences in education and care (Jackson, 2013b), a key consideration arising from the findings of this study.

3.2 **Adolescence and transition to adulthood**

3.2.1 ***Contemporary adolescence***

Adolescence has traditionally been regarded as a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood, but this view has been complicated in recent years by acknowledgement that not only does puberty start earlier than previously, but that greater engagement in further and higher education has delayed the age at which young people are able to attain independence from their parents (Furlong, 2009). These shifts have extended all three of the key changes of status traditionally associated with adolescence, namely the transition from school to work; gaining independence from the family; and moving permanently out of the parental home (Coleman, 2011). Challenging economic

circumstances, including relatively high levels of youth unemployment (DfE/NS, 2014a) and high housing prices have exacerbated this trend. Consequently, there has been a 20 per cent increase in the proportion of young adults in the UK aged 20-34 living with a parent or parents since 1997, to a figure of three million, despite the population in this age group remaining fairly stable over that time (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

For many young people, the transition to independence has become more complex as well as longer, with traditional linear trajectories giving way to periods of 'backtracking' (Furlong, 2009: pages 1-2) and uncertainty (Heinz, 2009). Some researchers have used the term 'emerging adulthood' to describe the period of instability typically experienced between ages eighteen and 25 (Tanner and Arnett, 2009) and which has been exacerbated by the recent economic downturn. Heinz (2009) draws attention to the tension between the expectations of a culture of individualism, which requires young people to give early attention to active decision-making to construct a meaningful biography in the context of insecure labour markets, and the extended transition to attaining independence described above.

In the UK, Wolf concludes that there is currently a lack of high quality vocational qualifications and pathways for young people aged 14-19, coupled with a tendency for educational accountability measures to encourage young people to opt for easier courses associated with limited prospects, at a cost to basic skills in mathematics and literacy (Wolf, 2011). The Wolf Review of Vocational Education highlighted the importance of ensuring that young people are not 'tracked in irreversible ways' even before they reach sixteen (page 11), which may be of particular pertinence in the case of young people whose full academic potential may not as yet be evident at that age due to disrupted personal and educational histories. Recent legislation requires young people in England to remain in education and/or training until eighteen (Education and Skills Act 2008, Part 1 and Education Act 2011, section 74) and all those who have not achieved Maths and English GCSE at grades A*-C by the end of Year 11 will continue work in those subjects (Department for Education, 2012b). These provisions are in line with developments elsewhere (Hodgen et al., 2013) and together with a policy of increasing apprenticeships, may improve the prospects of some young people in England, but they were not in force at the time of this research.

3.2.2 *The developmental tasks of adolescence*

Despite the rapidly changing social context, the core developmental tasks of adolescence remain constant, and include physical (including sexual) and cognitive maturation; development of self-concept; achieving independence from parents; and the foregrounding of peer relationships, including the development of intimate relationships (Call and Mortimer, 2001; Coleman, 2011). Detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this thesis, but according to Coleman (2011), during adolescence children develop formal operational thought (the ability to understand abstract concepts and to apply logical reasoning to problem-solving) and demonstrate advancements in attention, memory, information-processing speed, information organisation, and meta-cognition (the ability to reflect upon, plan and control cognitive processes). It is important to note that development of these skills is dependent upon external factors including the learning environment, personal interests and perhaps the encouragement of significant adults (Coleman, 2011).

Adolescence is also a time during which social engagement expands beyond home and school (Call and Mortimer, 2001), in response to significant advances in young people's social cognition, with development of moral and political judgements and of 'adolescent egocentrism'. Adolescent egocentrism is a term used to describe young people's tendency to behave as though they are concerned with the response of an 'imaginary audience', which is assumed by the young person to have the same preoccupations – with, for example, their appearance – as the adolescence him- or herself. Associated with this is construction of the adolescent's 'personal fable', which elevates the individual's personal feelings to a special status and serves to bolster his or her self-concept during a time of rapid change (Coleman, 2011). Another key social developmental task of adolescence relates to impression formation, which enables young people to interpret the feelings and actions of others; distinguish their own impressions from those of others; and associate different behaviour with different situations, facilitating the making of new social relationships and appropriate conduct in group situations (Coleman, 2011). In relation to moral reasoning, it appears that sensitive parental intervention, avoiding direct challenge but encouraging dialogue, may enhance development (Coleman, 2011).

As adolescents develop cognitively and physically, gain greater autonomy and encounter a wider range of social environments, so their self-concept develops. During this period,

it is important for psychological maturation that young people make sense of the social world and their place within it, as their perception of themselves and their own agency will later impact significantly on their response to life experiences (Coleman, 2011). According to Harter (2012), children do not have the cognitive abilities to construct a theory of the self which meets the criteria identified by scholars in the field: this is not achieved until late adolescence or even early adulthood. Early adolescence (ages eleven to thirteen) sees a proliferation of multiple selves, which may cause distress through middle adolescence (ages fourteen to sixteen), arising from an inability to resolve unstable or contradictory representations of self, particularly for girls (Harter, 2012). In late adolescence (seventeen to nineteen) young people develop a sense of possible future selves, associated with an increased sense of agency (Harter, 2012). Together with adolescent egotism, development of self-concept explains the preoccupation with self and introspection associated with adolescence. These developmental tasks are briefly outlined here because of the implications for young people who are required to understand their place in the social world and construct a theory of the self when not living with their birth parents and often while harbouring a strong sense of parental rejection and/or of failure to meet parental expectations.

Self-esteem is an aspect of self-concept, regarded by Coleman (2011) as a good indicator of coping and adaptation. Parental influence is the most important factor in childhood and although peers gradually become more influential from late childhood, the importance of parental support to self-esteem does not decrease in adolescence: rather, parents and peers are influential in different domains, with parental support important in matters relating to school and family (Harter, 2012). In relation to educational attainment, it remains unclear whether success in school promotes self-esteem or self-esteem enhances academic performance, but the influence is domain-specific (Coleman, 2011): accordingly, academic success alone will not provide self-esteem in other areas of young people's lives such as their relationships.

3.2.3 *The focal model of adolescence*

Although adolescence is still widely portrayed in the media as a period of turbulence, the 'storm and stress' theory of adolescence posited in the early twentieth century was largely discredited in the 1960s and 1970s by research showing that most young people negotiate adolescence fairly smoothly and maintain good relationships with their parents

for the most part (Susman and Rogol, 2004; Coleman, 2011). More recent models include the lifecourse perspective, which seeks to understand human development through the main transitions and significant events or 'turning points', and is closely associated with developmental contextualism (a theory associated with Bronfenbrenner, among others), and the focal model put forward by Coleman (Coleman, 1974).

The focal model is based on empirical research demonstrating that young people cope with the developmental relationship demands of adolescence by 'pacing' themselves and tackling one issue at a time. Goossens and Marcoen (1999) have linked the model more explicitly to the process of individuation; that is, the way in which reliance on parents in early adolescence gradually gives way to separation from parents in late adolescence. Other researchers such as Kloep (1999) have considered its applicability to a wider range of issues confronting adolescents. The model posits that adolescents most likely to experience difficulty are those confronted with multiple challenges simultaneously (Coleman, 2011), which would include the vast majority of those ageing out of care.

Simmons et al.'s research in the USA has endorsed Coleman's work in relation to early adolescents experiencing multiple life changes concurrently with the move to junior high school, demonstrating that multiple stressors are associated with a decline in grade point average for boys and girls as well as a reduction in self-esteem in girls. They use the expression 'arenas of comfort' to describe the importance of adolescents being able to draw on stability and comfort in at least one area of their lives or in one set of relationships (Simmons et al., 1987). This perspective enables focus on the sources of social support and protection of their self-concept available to adolescents, rather than on the stressors experienced in their lives (Call and Mortimer, 2001). Call and Mortimer (2001) suggest that relationships with parents are of more significance in this regard than those with peers or in the workplace and that mothers are considerably more likely to be a key source of support for adolescents than fathers, although adolescents are likely to feel more comfortable with the parent of their own gender. Arenas of comfort outside the family can help to cushion negative effects of stress in the parental relationship, however. Girls report closer relationships with their peers than do boys (Call and Mortimer, 2001). These findings show little variance by socioeconomic status, although a higher socioeconomic background and a two-parent family is associated with a sense of comfort in more arenas of adolescents' lives, which in turn correlates to better mental health (Call and Mortimer, 2001).

The notion of arenas of comfort promotes attention to the way in which adolescents actively choose challenging or supportive social contexts and enables analysis of this process with regard to the macrosocial structures in which young people develop (Call and Mortimer, 2001). This concept of adolescent agency is central to the focal model: that is, that young people actively construct their own adolescence and that their ability to cope as well as most do with the transitional tasks of adolescence is attributable in no small part to the way in which adolescents shape their own adaptation (Coleman, 2011). The assertion that adolescents actively choose to resolve one issue before moving on to another is questioned by Goossens and Marcoen (1999) and Kloeps (1999). Coleman recognises that young people do not have equal opportunities to control the way in which they manage their own development but concludes that those who are unavoidably confronted by many challenges concurrently are more likely to experience difficulty.

Although the focal model is not free from criticism therefore, and is relatively underdeveloped in the literature, it offers a powerful explanation for the particular difficulties faced by care leavers in their transition to adulthood. Stein describes this process as 'accelerated and compressed' (Stein, 2006a: page 274), to capture the way in which care leavers generally become independent at an earlier age than their peers, after a shorter transition period, and with little or no opportunity to return 'home' should they encounter difficulties. The high proportion of children entering care over the age of ten and moving to live independently at a very young age, together with the multiple difficulties they face and the limited support in leaving care have been set out in Chapter 2. Education and social care systems both impose enforced transitions upon young people for whom the developmental tasks of adolescence are more problematic than for those who have grown up within their birth families, and who may be concurrently grappling with significant personal challenges, including emotional trauma and educational deficits. Consequently, care leavers are likely to have limited control over the way in which they manage the multiple issues arising in adolescence. They are likely to need more time than their peers to make a successful transition to independent adulthood, yet they tend to be catapulted into independence at an earlier age. The focal model of adolescence explains the need for the creation of more normative transitions for young people leaving care (Stein, 2006a).

3.3 Risk and Resilience

3.3.1 *Resilience and Coping*

While the focal model provides a representation of normal adolescent development, resilience theory explains how young people at risk of negative life outcomes may nonetheless function well. Resilience is a useful concept in the context of research with looked-after children because it can help to explain why some care leavers do much better than others and what support is most likely to be effective. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind during the following discussion that issues of definition and measurement of resilient adaptation remain subject to debate (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012) and that the resilience literature lacks a common cross-disciplinary conceptual framework (Sameroff et al., 2003). Zolkoski and Bullock describe risk factors for resilient adaptation as no more than '*probability* statements, the likelihood of a gamble whose levels of risk change depending on the time and place' (2012: page 2295) and caution that interventions based on resilience must take careful account of the particular population at which they are targeted.

Resilience is 'a dynamic process wherein individuals display positive adaptation despite experiences of significant adversity or trauma' (Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000: page 858). A resilience framework provides an attractive lens through which to consider the trajectories of vulnerable young people, because it acknowledges children's agency and can incorporate the effect of interaction between the child and their environment, in addition to encouraging a focus on strengths and competence rather than deficits and maladjustment (Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000). The literature uses either the conceptualisation of stressors and coping strategies, or that of risk factors and resilience. However, in both cases research demonstrates that stressors or risk factors often occur in clusters and that the higher the number of such factors, the greater the likelihood of poor life outcomes (Sameroff et al., 2003; Coleman, 2011), including problem behaviour (Gerard and Buehler, 2004).

The resilient adaptation displayed by an individual may vary over time and be exhibited only in some areas of their life (Rutter, 2006) because it develops through the 'steeling' effect (Rutter, 1985: page 600) of exposure to manageable levels of adversity. The relation between risk factors and resilience is complex (Sameroff et al., 2003; Coleman, 2011; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), while concepts of risk and resilience cannot be applied to individual young people's experiences in a straightforward way, as critical events and

individuals can precipitate unpredictable turns (MacDonald, 2007). However, it appears that while most children and young people recover from short episodes of adversity if protective factors are available, earlier and longer experiences of risk factors are more difficult to overcome (Yates et al., 2003). Similarly, in the 'coping' literature, the number, severity and timing of stressors will affect an adolescent's ability to cope with the changes they experience (Coleman, 2011). Chronic stressors appear to be more problematic than single events: for example, ongoing conflict in relationships with parents is a greater challenge to successful adaptation than a change in family structure (Call and Mortimer, 2001). Coleman cites 'continuing family conflict' and 'multiple changes of homes and school', as particular challenges to resilient adaptation in adolescents (2011: page 222). These two kinds of life experience are perhaps the most common to blight the lives of looked-after children.

Risk factors are commonly classified into individual, family and community factors, as are the protective factors that have been identified as enabling young people experiencing a high accumulation of risk factors to demonstrate resilient adaptation (Yates et al., 2003; Coleman, 2011; Zolkoski and Bullock, 2012). Individual risk factors include poor health, low intelligence quotient, anxiety, hyperactivity, poor attention and a readiness to become frustrated. Family risk factors include harsh or inconsistent parental discipline, family conflict, parental ill-health, parental involvement in crime, parental death or divorce, and disruptive siblings. Community factors include poverty, poor housing, poor schooling, and high crime rates.

The 'coping' literature suggests that young people demonstrate different approaches to coping, which may be adaptive (such as participating in sporting or creative activities) or maladaptive (including drug and alcohol abuse) (Coleman, 2011). Active strategies such as discussion and seeking help are most common (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013), but in Frydenberg and Lewis' study of 673 students in Melbourne, Australia, 'seeking professional help' was a little-used strategy (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993). Age, gender, personality and ethnicity are the most significant correlates of coping (Frydenberg, 2008), although it is difficult to tease out differences in coping strategies according to ethnicity because of the cultural variations within different ethnic groups (Coleman, 2011). Older adolescents are more likely to use tension-reduction strategies, such as drug use and smoking, and have a greater tendency to self-blame than younger ones (Frydenberg, 2008), but from age fifteen young people increasingly attempt to

communicate with the person causing the problem and seek the advice of friends and people experiencing similar issues (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013).

Girls appear more likely to report more stressful events in their lives and to feel more threatened than boys by adverse circumstances (Coleman, 2011), particularly with respect to relationship stressors (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013), whilst boys appear more likely to be adversely affected by family difficulties than girls (Coleman and Hagell, 2007b). Girls appear to worry more, to anticipate negative outcomes and to withdraw, but also address problems immediately and demonstrate use of effective strategies (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013). Boys, by contrast, tend to be more optimistic and to tackle problems later (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013). They are also more likely to use active coping strategies, including aggression or confrontational responses (Coleman, 2011). Boys in Frydenberg and Lewis' (1993) study were more likely to use physical recreation, but the authors point out that this may be culturally influenced in the Australian context. Girls in the same study were more likely to use tension-reduction strategies (such as crying or using drugs or alcohol) and 'wishful thinking', an expression used by Frydenberg and Lewis to signify the tendency to hope rather than to take action, which the authors regarded as possibly indicative of a lack of empowerment. However, Sieffke-Krenke, in seven studies of over 3,000 young people aged twelve to nineteen from Germany, Israel, Finland and the USA using both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs, found that boys were more likely to resort to drug or alcohol use (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013).

A number of factors in adolescence can assist the development of resilient adaptation, including a sense of personal agency (Rutter, 2006) or good self-concept (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012); a supportive relationship with at least one competent adult (Masten and others, 1990; Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000), good peer relationships (Sameroff et al., 2003); and positive educational experiences (Masten et al., 1990; Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000). Evidence suggests that girls are more likely to depend on social relationships for support in stressful circumstances (Coleman and Hagell, 2007b; Sieffke-Krenke, 2013) and supportive relationships across a number of domains have been found to be more important for girls than boys (Call and Mortimer, 2001). However, social support is regarded by Coleman as 'critical' (2011: page 224) and in relation to adolescents he concludes that, of all protective factors 'it is the family which plays the key role' (Coleman, 2011: page 224). This, coupled with Sieffke-Krenke's finding of the 'great importance of family in coping with stress' (page 226) and that adolescents from

conflict-ridden and disengaged families experience high levels of stress, but are more likely to withdraw and less likely actively to seek solutions (Sieffke-Krenke, 2013), perhaps contributes to explaining the particular vulnerability of many looked-after children.

3.3.2 *Risk factors in the lives of looked-after children*

From a resilience perspective, looked-after children are often highly vulnerable to poor developmental trajectories because of persistent exposure to risk factors from an early age (Coleman and Hagell, 2007a), and the inflating effect of cumulative risk factors (Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000; Newman, 2004). The incidence of social, behavioural, emotional and educational difficulties in the looked-after population, although considerably higher than in the general population, is very varied (Rutter, 2000), reflecting the diversity of family background and experiences of children in the care system. Rutter (2000) argues that the high levels of parenting problems and/or psychopathology in the parents of looked-after children indicate that children may have genetic vulnerabilities as well as being exposed to environmental risks in their family of origin. However, a number of commentators, including Rutter (2000) and Coleman (2011), draw attention to the importance of considering also the interaction between children and their carers: that is, that parenting practice is determined by the characteristics of the child as well as those of the parent.

Risk factors are often interconnected in the lives of looked-after children, because of the way in which family and community risk factors are associated with or impact on individual risk factors. Community risk factors highlighted in the resilience literature (such as poverty) align with the social conditions which create stresses on parenting and thereby the conditions in which child maltreatment is more likely. Parenting practices such as harsh or inconsistent discipline may amount to physical or emotional abuse if severe, while witnessing domestic abuse is recognised as potentially sufficiently emotionally damaging to reach the threshold for significant harm under the Children Act 1989 section 31(9).

Only a brief overview of the substantial body of literature on the effects of child maltreatment can be presented here. In addition to poor educational attainment and direct physical injury from physical abuse, child maltreatment is associated with

significant mental and physical health problems, including obesity and eating disorders; poor behaviour, including aggression; criminal conduct; and substance misuse (Gilbert et al., 2009b). Repeated exposure to maltreatment over time and experience of multiple types of abuse exacerbate the psychological consequences, which are likely to persist into adulthood (Gilbert et al., 2009b). Maltreated infants are far more likely than non-maltreated infants to exhibit insecure attachments (Harter, 2012) or disorganised/disoriented attachment relationships (Glaser, 2000) and children who have suffered prolonged periods of maltreatment may also exhibit changes in brain function associated with the effect of repeated stress responses, including symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), aggression and some types of memory problems (Glaser, 2000). Maltreated children, particularly those who are physically abused, are much more vulnerable than their peers to depression and suicidal ideation (Dunn et al., 2013). Maltreatment also affects a young child's self-awareness and ability to attend to his or her own wishes and feelings as a consequence of sustaining a state of hypervigilance to the actions of others, and in older children results in negative self-perceptions which, in the case of chronic and severe maltreatment, may amount to a view of the self as despicable (Harter, 2012). Experience of maltreatment may also affect the integration of the multiple selves constructed during middle adolescence (ages fourteen to sixteen), potentially resulting in dissociative identity disorder (previously known as multiple personality disorder) (Harter, 2012).

Experience of childhood sexual abuse is associated with a wide range of adverse medical, psychological, behavioural and socio-economic outcomes in early adulthood. Recent findings from a 30-year longitudinal study in New Zealand (Fergusson et al., 2013) confirm the association of child sexual abuse with mental health problems, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexually risky behaviours, physical illness and unemployment. More severe symptoms of PTSD are associated with poorer social functioning in adolescent girls seeking treatment for PTSD with a history of child sexual abuse. Particular symptoms, including attempting to avoid reminders of the trauma, feeling socially detached, and emotional numbness, have a particularly harmful effect on young people's social functioning (McLean et al., 2013), including a likely deleterious impact on future relationships of insecure or disorganised/disoriented attachment patterns (Harter, 2012). The evidence as to the effect of PTSD arising from sexual abuse on academic performance is inconclusive (McLean et al., 2013).

Neglect has received less attention than other forms of maltreatment but appears to be potentially as damaging (Gilbert et al., 2009b). Analysis of data from the 1958 British birth cohort survey confirms that severe neglect in early childhood is associated with slower growth and shorter stature in adulthood (Denholm et al., 2013). Inadequate stimulation at sensitive periods of brain development may result in permanent damage to cognitive function (Glaser, 2000). Insufficiently sensitive interactions with very young children such as those associated with parental depression may affect the development of the infant's self-regulation of affect, which may be exhibited later in life in aggression or hypervigilance (Glaser, 2000).

3.3.3 *Promoting resilience in looked-after children and care leavers*

Geenen and Powers (2007) in the US and Schofield (2001) in the UK emphasise the need for caring relationships to be maintained in the lives of looked-after children through adolescence and into adulthood, but research in both jurisdictions has exposed a dearth of such relationships for many such children (Geenen and Powers, 2007; Mallon, 2007). Where achieved, these relationships may be found in informal sources, in preference to that of professionals (Newman, 2004; Gilligan, 2008), and may as a consequence be vulnerable to disruption through changes in care arrangements (Driscoll, 2013a). More generally, Mallon, in a study of care leavers who returned to education in adulthood, concluded that protective factors appeared to be the result of chance rather than good planning and that education and social care services 'could do a great deal more to identify and promote protective factors in the lives of young people in care' (Mallon, 2007: page 115).

Coleman (2011: page 224) calls for 'stress on the reciprocal nature of relationships' and 'an emphasis on adolescents as constructors or shapers of their own development'. This is important not least because resilient adaptation in the absence of consistent and caring adult relationships may give rise to an overly strong sense of self-reliance (Dixon and others, 2006; Cameron, 2007; Samuels and Pryce, 2008). Self-reliance may be regarded as an exercise of personal agency and may facilitate the development of the skills required for independence; the young people in Samuel and Pryce's study regarded self-reliance as a positive attribute. However, Cameron (2007) warns of the importance of the context in which self-reliance develops and is exercised, and particularly the role

of inadequate support. She suggests that professionals should beware of regarding care leavers' refusal of professional support as 'difficult' behaviour.

There are, of course, a number of other ways in which adolescents may exercise such agency as is available to them in ways which are not regarded as in their best interests by professionals. Commentators such as Bottrell (2009), for example, assert that resistance to participation in normative activities such as education may represent, from the young person's perspective, protective adaptation, through rejection of discourses which construct them as of little worth. Nonetheless, schools have an important role in providing a 'normalising' environment for vulnerable children and in the promotion of resilient trajectories (Gilligan, 2000; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Newman, 2004; Cameron, 2007), including through supportive relationships with staff, provision of extracurricular activities (Gilligan, 2000; Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000) and by encouraging children's capacity to exercise agency (Schofield, 2001; Rutter, 2006), opportunities for which are often limited in care (Geenen and Powers, 2007; Leeson, 2007). Experience of educational success may act as a 'turning point' by enhancing self-esteem and offering new opportunities (Rutter, 2006; Shepherd et al., 2010), or by engendering a sense of self-efficacy (Drapeau et al., 2007; Hagell, 2007). Academic achievement has been identified as a key factor in determining adult well-being in relation to fostered children in the US (Pecora et al., 2006) and children brought up in care in the UK (Jackson and Martin, 1998).

The resilience literature also suggests that the changes in status and functioning associated with transition to adulthood may provide a particular opportunity to redress risk factors from earlier childhood (Masten et al., 2004), a notion referred to in the literature in terms of 'turning points'. Young people leaving care will experience changes in both their personal lives and their education that have the potential to enhance or undermine resilient adaptation. In particular, the literature demonstrates that development of a relationship of trust with a supportive adult may serve to initiate a turning point (Drapeau et al., 2007). Accordingly, notwithstanding the importance of stability and continuity in the lives of looked-after children, the changes associated with leaving care can provide a catalyst for positive change (Dixon et al., 2006; Wade and Munro, 2008). Indeed, despite their generally poor academic and personal outcomes, care leavers often exhibit remarkably resilient adaptation in pursuing their education and career plans in the face of significant practical and emotional challenges (McGloin and

Widom, 2001; Allen, 2003; Cameron, 2007; Driscoll, 2013a), although there is some evidence to suggest that young women care leavers are more likely to exhibit resilient adaptation than young men (McGloin and Widom, 2001).

Stein (2006b; 2012: page 170) has developed a categorisation of care leavers using a resilience framework, although it is important to bear in mind that resilient adaptation varies over the life course and the category into which a young person appears to fall should not be regarded as fixed. Stein's revised categories are 'moving on', 'survivors' and 'strugglers' (categorised as 'victims' in Stein's earlier work). Those in the first category account for up to 20 per cent of care leavers (Stein, 2013) and are likely to have benefited from stability, secure attachment and some educational success in care. Most will have left care later than average in a planned move and felt well-prepared for independence, having been able to take advantage of support available to them. Young people in the 'moving on' group have been able to develop a positive identity through participating in the 'normal' trajectories of further or higher education, partnering and parenthood. 'Survivors' make up the bulk of the cohort (Stein, 2013) and regard themselves as self-reliant, having been shaped by their life circumstances and experiences to be tough and self-sufficient, a view often belied by continuing dependence on services and difficulty in making and keeping supportive relationships. They are likely to have left care younger than those in the 'moving on' group, often in response to a trigger incident such as the breakdown of a foster placement, and with limited or no academic qualifications. New supportive relationships, often including less formal ones with personal advisors and/or mentors, may assist this group, as may stable accommodation. Rekindling birth family relationships may be helpful for some, but problematic for others. Stein (2013) estimates that 'strugglers' make up the 10-12 per cent of care leavers who are at most risk of poor life outcomes. They are likely to have experienced the most harmful treatment before entering care, to the extent that the care system is unlikely to achieve stability for them. Cumulative histories of disruption and emotional, behavioural and social problems may culminate in rejection of and alienation from professional and personal support, an early age of leaving care, and a high likelihood of unemployment and homelessness requiring specialist professional services.

3.4 Conceptualising the state's duties to children leaving care

Thus far, I have considered the changing social and economic context of modern adolescence, the particular vulnerabilities associated with looked-after children, and their condensed transition to adulthood. I have highlighted the importance of the role of, and children's relationships with, their parents and/or carers during adolescence and I have set out in Chapter 2 the piecemeal legislative response to the recognition of the need for additional support from their corporate parent to young people leaving care. In this section I draw on emerging theoretical perspectives on children's rights to interrogate the nature and sources of the state's duties to care leavers. I combine these insights with those drawn from the focal model of adolescence and resilience theory to consider how the appropriate extent of those duties to young people approaching and beyond the age of legal majority might be determined and more clearly articulated.

3.4.1 *The nature of the state's responsibilities to children in its care*

As I explained in Chapter 2, the local authority caring for children whose parents are unwilling or unable to do so themselves has parental responsibility only where the child is in care, and accordingly in some cases, such as that of orphans and UASC, there may be no adult with parental responsibility for the child alive or in the UK. Parental responsibility is somewhat loosely defined in English law in the Children Act 1989 section 3(1) as 'all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property'. For children in care, parental responsibility vests in the corporation and not in an individual. In response to concerns that difficulties in obtaining permission from local authorities for children's activities delay decision-making, prevent children taking advantages of opportunities offered to them, and reduce their sense of belonging in their home environment, the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 have recently (after the completion of fieldwork for this study) been amended by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 (Department for Education, 2013b). The new provisions (at paragraphs 3.139-3.146) expressly stipulate that authority to take day-to-day decisions should be delegated to foster carers or residential care home workers and stress that under the Education Act 1996 (section 576), 'parent' is defined to include a person caring for a child and therefore foster carers should be treated in the same way as natural parents in relation to information-sharing and consent to participate in school activities. Decisions about

delegation of such authority should take into account the views of the child and respect the child's capacity to make decisions on his or her own behalf.

Such clarification may prove to be valuable in enhancing the everyday lives of looked-after children and in freeing up social workers' time, but does not directly impact on the articulation of the level of services and quality of corporate parenting to which children might expect to be entitled both in and on leaving care. There is wide variation in the educational attainment of looked-after children (Jackson, 2013a) and in the quality of leaving care services (Stein, 2012) in English local authorities. The duties imposed on the local authority by the Children Act 1989 section 22(3)(a) and (b) (to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked-after children and 'to make such use of services available for children cared for by their own parents as appears to the authority reasonable' in his or her case) are weaker than those of the Child Care Act 1980 which they replaced, in which the child's welfare was the local authority's 'first consideration'. There appears to be greater scope in the later statute for the local authority to take into account other responsibilities and financial restraints (Bainham and Gilmore, 2013). Furthermore, the local authority may act inconsistently with the duty under section 22 where 'necessary for the purposes of protecting members of the public from serious injury' (section 22(6)) and must do so when directed to do so by the Secretary of State (section 22(7) and (8)). It can be seen therefore, that the local authority may not in all circumstances be required to act in a way which might be expected of a parent with the best interests of his or her child at heart.

Statutory guidance uses the concept of the 'reasonable parent' in setting out the expectations on local authorities towards the children whom they are looking after. Reference is made to offering looked-after children 'more than one chance to succeed' (HM Government, 2010: paragraph 5.6) and providing care leavers with 'the opportunities and chances needed to help them move successfully to adulthood' (Department for Education, 2010b: page 1). There is some use of the language of duties (e.g. 'must'), for example in relation to the role of the personal advisor in providing advice and support and participating in reviews. In many respects, however, the guidance may be regarded as weak, setting out broad expectations rather than specific rights. The following section considers the basis for the state's responsibilities towards children leaving care in order to underpin discussion of the rights which might be claimed against the state by young people ageing out of care.

3.4.2 *The sources of the state's responsibilities to children in its care*

Hollingsworth has identified four sources of justification for the state's responsibilities towards children leaving care through analysis of documents and Parliamentary debates leading to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 (Hollingsworth, 2013a). Of these four types of responsibility, two – *generational* responsibility (the collective responsibility of adults for the nation's vulnerable children) and *equity-based* responsibility (drawing on the demands of social justice in relation to disadvantaged groups) apply fairly widely. However the remaining two categories derive from the particular circumstances of certain groups of children. In relation to looked-after children, the notion of *reparatory* responsibility acknowledges that the state has a duty to make amends to young people who have been let down by society in their treatment before and/or after entering the care system[8], whilst *assumed* responsibility recognises that state interference in family life and adoption of the parenting role carries with it an obligation to undertake that duty in the manner of a responsible parent.

Reparatory responsibility validates the assumption of ongoing parental obligations to care leavers imposed on local authorities. In recent years the 'New Sociology of Childhood' has tended to focus attention on the child as a 'being' rather than a 'becoming', in response to an identified lack of acknowledgement of the social agency of children (James et al., 1998; Prout, 2005; James and James, 2008). However, it is imperative not to lose sight of the importance of completion of the developmental tasks of childhood. During childhood, the state actively limits the extent to which children may exercise autonomy and creates enforced dependency by children on their parents – for example, by requiring them to engage in full-time education and by restricting the amount and nature of remunerated employment which they may undertake. Using a capabilities approach (regarded by Nussbaum as related and complementary to a human rights approach because of its foundation in the assumption that all humans have certain inalienable entitlements (Nussbaum, 2011)), Dixon & Nussbaum, (2012) consider the implications of this dependency. They argue (at page 576) that the state should

> assume responsibility for protecting children from the consequences of the special vulnerability it creates in relation to the decisions of others—by insuring

[8] Case law (e.g. *Z v. United Kingdom* [2001] 2 FLR 612) confirms a positive duty on states to protect children from maltreatment under the ECHR, incorporated into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998.

> them against the risk that their parents (or legal guardian) will turn out to be unable, or unwilling, to take reasonable steps to protect their capabilities

– as is the case for children taken into state care. For this group of children, as I have argued above, the harm they have suffered prior to entry into care, often compounded by late entry into care, results in an overwhelming burden in adolescence, which cannot be tackled in an orderly and sequential manner in accordance with the focal model because of the imposition of societally-determined transitions coupled with early expectations of independence. The significance of the leaving care provisions enacted since 2000 lies in the acknowledgement that *de facto* autonomy at the age of majority may not be achievable for children in state care, and the consequential creation of a duty on the state to compensate - or make reparation - for that deficit as children emerge into young adulthood.

A rights perspective is able to articulate the justification of these duties more clearly. Underlying theories of moral rights is the notion that all persons are entitled both to equality of dignity and concern, and to autonomy (Freeman, 1992: page 34). Eekelaar (1986) identifies children as having three broad hierarchical categories of interests: a 'basic' interest (in fundamental physical and emotional care and stimulation), a 'developmental' interest and an 'autonomy' interest. The notion of a 'developmental' interest posits that, subject to the social and economic circumstances of the society to which he or she belongs, everyone should have an equal opportunity to develop his or her capacities during childhood, such that he or she does not suffer disproportionate disadvantage upon reaching adulthood. Since fulfilment of this interest lies within areas such as health and education, for such an interest to be recognised as a legal right, it must be translated into duties through legislation and public policy. Writing in 1986, Eekelaar concluded that, save for the duty to ensure their children's education (now under the Education Act 1996 section 7), parents in intact families are under no duty to fulfil their children's developmental interests, which for most children is also poorly or patchily protected as a right against the state in English law[9].

One example of specific duties imposed on local authorities that may be regarded as providing rights to children to meet their developmental interests cited by Eekelaar

[9] Further consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis, but minimum requirements of parental care are laid down in legislation such as the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, under s1(2) of which parents are criminally liable for failure to provide their child with adequate food, lodging, clothing or medical aid.

(1986) is that of provision for special educational needs. The duties owed to care leavers and set out above might be conceptualised as a right in a similar fashion, but to consider these provisions from this perspective highlights a number of weaknesses. These include the difficulty in enforcing poorly-articulated rights and the current discrepancy between the level of support offered to those young people continuing in education (and close to securing their capabilities) compared with those who are unable or unwilling to do so. Such analysis highlights the failure of the provisions to offer equality of opportunity to some of the most vulnerable young people.

Eekelaar's concept of an 'autonomy' interest comprises a child's freedom of choice in relation to his or her lifestyle and social relationships. This interest must cede precedence to the child's 'basic' and 'developmental' interests in any circumstances in which they conflict, but should be fulfilled where possible without risk to the other two interests (Eekelaar, 1986). The 'autonomy' interest can be justified by reference to acknowledgement of children as people in their own right notwithstanding their status of legal minority, but also by the fact that young people are subject to a presumption of full capacity to autonomous life as soon as they reach legal adulthood. Hollingsworth argues that this presumption should give rise to a duty on the state to ensure that the child is equipped for fully autonomous adulthood upon attaining legal majority at the age of eighteen and has developed this argument in relation to children leaving youth custody through the concept of 'foundational rights' (Hollingsworth, 2013b).

3.4.3 *The concept of foundational rights and its application to looked-after children*

Hollingsworth's concept of foundational rights makes an important contribution to the 'theory gap' in relation to children's rights, a term used to refer to the uncertainty which continues to surround the theoretical basis for children's rights *qua* children (Ferguson, 2013). The concept explains how children's rights are distinct from those of adults, through analysis of the difference between children's autonomy (as the basis in Hollingsworth's analysis for children's responsibility under the criminal law) and 'full' *de facto* autonomy exercised by adults. There has been some criticism of utilization of a rights framework in relation to child care work on the basis that, in a neoliberal political environment, rights tend to be posited on the assumption of the autonomous liberal citizen and to exist 'within a consumerist framework of legal relationships' (Smith, 2009:

page 11). Within the context of children's social care, such a conceptualisation ignores the significance of relationships and of social context in achieving the conditions required to achieve 'full' autonomy. The strength of Hollingsworth's foundational rights framework is that it builds on recent work around relational interpretations of Sen's capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2003; Nussbaum, 2011), as well as Fineman's categorisation of 'social assets' (Fineman, 2008) to provide a richer understanding of these conditions. 'Full autonomy' is distinguished from a narrower liberal definition of autonomy (comprising no more than adequate capacity to exercise agency coupled with freedom from external constraints on doing so (Hollingsworth, 2013b)), by the incorporation of recognition of the significance of relationships and social context in the identification and exercise of choice.

This wider relational conceptualisation of autonomy is particularly important with regard to children because of the primacy of parental and other personal relationships and of supportive social networks in achieving the developmental tasks of adolescence and in promoting resilient adaptation, as set out earlier in this chapter. Hollingsworth utilises accounts of autonomy as a relational concept in order to incorporate consideration of the way in which young people's relationships and social experiences shape their developing identities, and of the interaction between young people and their social worlds, which impact upon the choices available to young people and the way in which they exercise those choices. She does so by drawing upon the related concepts of 'capabilities', particularly as developed by Martha Nussbaum, and of the 'assets' required for the development of full autonomy (a term used by Martha Fineman (Fineman, 2008) and Peadar Kirby (Kirby, 2006) in relation to the concept of vulnerability).

Nussbaum's development of Sen's capability approach (Sen, 1979) stresses the importance of focusing on what people are able to do and to be – their 'opportunities and liberties' (Nussbaum, 2000: page 71). Nussbaum argues that the concept of capabilities is instrumental in articulating what it means to assure to an individual a fundamental right, in that where a right is secured, a person is placed 'in a position of capability to function in that area' (Nussbaum, 2003: page 37). Nussbaum (2003: page 41) has identified ten 'central human capabilities', of which four are of particular relevance to this thesis, the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh. The fourth capability, 'Senses, Imagination and Thought', includes

> [b]eing able to use the senses, to imagine, think and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.

The fifth, entitled 'Emotions', she defines as

> [b]eing able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us…. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development).

The sixth, 'Practical Reason', requires '[b]eing able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.'

The seventh capability is 'Affiliation', which Nussbaum describes as

> A. Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation…).
>
> B. Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.

Nussbaum has developed three categories of capabilities: 'basic' or innate capabilities, which are present at birth; 'internal capabilities', which are acquired, primarily in childhood, and comprise 'trained or developed traits and abilities' (Nussbaum, 2011: page 21); and 'combined' capabilities, which represent the interaction of internal capabilities with opportunities offered by the external environment in a way which enables the exercise of autonomy. Hollingsworth points to the particular importance of exposure to socialising environments in childhood, especially family life and school, for the development of a child's internal capabilities. Whilst parents are primarily responsible and influential in the development of the child's internal capacities, the social, political, economic and legal environment created by the state will impact on the external conditions which are relevant to the combined capabilities. For children for whom the role of parents has been assumed by the state, the state is the primary sphere of influence for both these sets of capabilities.

Fineman's categorisation of the assets required for the development of 'full' autonomy are not dissimilar from the capabilities developed by Sen and Nussbaum and are identified as being those required to be provided by society and state institutions to

mitigate vulnerability by enhancing individuals' 'resilience'. They comprise physical assets (such as material goods and wealth); human assets (given or developed capacities enabling an individual to acquire human capital, including health, education and employment); and social assets (supportive networks such as family relationships and community groups). Fineman (2008) uses the concept of 'assets' to argue in the American context for greater state responsibility for the way in which asset-conferring institutions such as education systems ensure equality in response to vulnerability (page 15). Fineman's focus is on the way in which institutions may operate to reproduce power or disadvantage, rather than how multiple individual identities create or compound inequality (what she calls a 'post-identity paradigm' (page 17)). This provides an attractive approach through which to interrogate the reproduction of inequality in the lives of looked-after children, both because of the heterogeneity of this group and because it enables attention to be drawn to the attributes of state institutions which are directly responsible for the upbringing of looked-after children, such as the local authority 'corporate parent'.

Consideration of the significance of childhood in the development of these 'assets' leads Hollingsworth (2013b) to identify a category of rights which support the conditions which will enable a child to exercise full autonomy and which she terms 'foundational' rights. She argues that the implication of the legal construct of childhood as a probationary period is that the state has a duty to ensure that children are equipped to exercise full autonomy on reaching legal majority, when the state removes the protection imposed during their childhood. Hollingsworth has developed the theory in the narrow context of the youth justice system but I argue that its principles are equally applicable to care leavers because for this group of children the state has not only taken on *assumed* responsibility (as in the case of young people leaving custody) but also holds *reparatory* responsibility.

Among the examples that Hollingsworth gives of the kind of rights that might qualify as foundational rights are two of particular relevance to the subject of this thesis, namely 'educational provision sufficient to develop the child's capacity for rational decision-making, as well as her future participation in political and community life' (2013b: page 1062) and 'protection of nurturing, positive, relationships that go beyond the prioritisation of certain *forms* of relationship to include also their *quality*' (page 1062). These foundational rights map neatly onto Fineman's categories of human assets and

social assets. They also reflect the interaction between a child's internal capabilities and the opportunities offered by the child's environment in keeping with the concept of combined capabilities. There are two particularly important implications of the concept of foundational rights for the examination in this thesis of the support offered to care leavers. First, it follows from the assertion that the state has a duty to ensure that young people reaching adulthood are equipped to exercise 'full' autonomy that, in relation to children for whom the state owes reparatory responsibility, that duty must extend beyond the age of legal majority, until such time as the young person secures the necessary conditions for the exercise of full autonomy. Second, the more vulnerable the child, or the further from securing his or her foundational rights, the greater the support he or she is owed by the state in the legal person of their corporate parent. Accordingly, the duties owed by their corporate parent to care leavers are not amenable to articulation by a 'one-size-fits-all' formula. Instead, they should be assessed on an individual basis, according to the particular needs of each young person and with regard to their individual exposure to risk and protective factors and the assets or capabilities required to assure to them their fundamental rights. Further, regard should be given to the importance of enabling young people to confront challenges and transitions in their own timeframe.

3.5 **Summary and Conclusion**

Understanding the way in which care leavers' lives develop in young adulthood is complicated by the interplay of many factors (Allen, 2003). In this chapter I have considered young people's transitions from care to autonomous adulthood from a number of perspectives. First, I have addressed the context of adolescent development, in recognition of the fact that this group of young people are first and foremost negotiating a particular stage of human development common to all their contemporaries. The social, economic and political environment in which young people make this transition to independence is critical to the opportunities available to them and the current climate is one in which young people's educational qualifications are likely to impact significantly on their life chances. The focal model of adolescence explains why looked-after children may struggle to focus on making up any educational deficits with which they have entered care, while often concurrently facing upheaval in their personal lives, at a time when they are also tackling the developmental tasks of adolescence and may still be subject to significant emotional trauma. Second, I have

considered the particular vulnerabilities of looked-after children and the factors associated with resilient adaptation in order to provide insight into the particular support needs of this group. Finally, I have utilised Hollingsworth's concept of foundational rights to examine the obligations of state institutions in relation to equipping looked-after children to enjoy a fully autonomous adulthood. While none of the three perspectives is unproblematic, the interaction of these different perspectives provides a broader understanding of the complexity of the issues faced by care leavers and the interaction between their experiences in their personal lives and education.

The theoretical perspectives set out in this chapter can together justify the imposition of a high level of responsibility upon the state to support young people leaving care and elucidate what the exercise of these duties might entail. I argue that the state has a *reparatory* responsibility to make amends to young people who have been let down by society in their treatment before and/or after entering the care system, and that once the state has taken over the care of a child from his or her parents, it owes *assumed* responsibility to undertake that duty in the manner of a responsible parent (Hollingsworth, 2013a). At the very least, this requires the provision of protective factors to enable a young person to display positive adaptation and overcome the adversity they have experienced. The concept of foundational rights sets a standard to which *all* young people are entitled, that is, achievement of the capacities required for the exercise of 'full' autonomy. The state's *assumed* parental responsibility therefore, should not cease at the age of legal maturity, but persist until reparation has been made and young people are equipped for autonomous adulthood.

Although it is evident from the policy and legislative activity set out in Chapter 2 that the education and life-chances of care leavers have remained high on the political agenda since the turn of the century, there is still a long way to go in improving outcomes for care leavers. As well as helping to justify and articulate the nature of the state's duties to care leavers, the theoretical perspectives explored in this chapter help to illuminate the reasons for the interdependence of children's experiences in care and education; the challenges in closing the educational attainment gap; and the potential for positive change during transition to adulthood. The decisions that young people make and the qualifications they obtain between the ages of fifteen and eighteen impact on their lives for many years into the future. The lack of theoretical underpinnings and the dearth of research into this particular period of young people's education together with

the recent change in the age to which children must participate in education and training provide the rationale for the current study. The specific aims of the research project are set out in the following chapter, which addresses the methodological choices and issues arising from the research.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the design of the study, justify the methodological choices I made and assess the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the study design. First I set out the reasons for choosing to foreground the voices of young people themselves and I describe the way in which the research questions were derived from the findings of a pilot study, as well as being influenced by emerging policy developments in relation to the education of looked-after children. I discuss the specific practical issues in relation to access to and sampling of potential participants and describe the profile of the study participants. I explain my approach to the interview process and explore the practical and ethical issues arising during data collection. I consider the key ethical considerations arising during the study and how I responded to these. I set out the way in which data were analysed and how I reached decisions as to which issues or data should be prioritised in writing up the findings. Finally I consider the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology and the limitations of the study.

4.2 Design of the study

4.2.1 *Foregrounding young people's own perspectives*

There are a number of justifications for focusing attention on the experiences and views of care leavers themselves. The most important of these to me derives from my academic interest in and commitment to the principle of children's rights. While children in the UK have been accorded protection rights on the basis of their developmental immaturity and vulnerability since at least the nineteenth century, the notion that children should enjoy a comparable range of rights to those of adults is still a relatively new one, and remains contested, although it has gained significant momentum from the implementation of the UNCRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) (Fortin, 2009). The UNCRC includes as one of its core principles a child's right to participate in decisions affecting him or her, which is set out in article 12.

Article 12 performs an important role in facilitating the child's acquisition of the necessary competencies to prepare him or her for autonomous adulthood, through recognition of the significance of children's social experiences in developing their decision-making capacities.

This principle may be regarded as of particular significance in relation to care leavers. Research involving young people engages their participation rights under the UNCRC, an especially meaningful exercise in relation to marginalised groups (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006). Winter concluded in 2006 that 'the detailed accounts of looked-after children themselves' are missing from the literature (Winter, 2006: page 55), complaining that the approach adopted in most research

> does not easily accommodate a view of looked-after children as active, skilled and competent agents in social processes and therefore does not fully engage with their participation rights (page 58).

Rather, she contended, research tends to be founded on a view of children as recipients of a service, the outcomes of which are defined by adult values. Such an approach is likely to compound the powerlessness of looked-after children, whose experience of corporate parenting often centres on being on the receiving end of decisions over which they have no influence (Leeson, 2007).

Incongruently however, looked-after children are generally expected to achieve independence earlier than their peers (Stein, 2006a), rendering attention to their participation rights of particular importance. The participants in this study were aged fifteen to eighteen, a life stage at which young people are becoming increasingly autonomous and during which they make a number of important decisions which may materially affect their outcomes in adult life. While the fact that children and adults often have different perspectives does not imply that either view is 'right' or 'wrong' (Holland, 2009: page 232), the perspectives of young people are the driving force behind their decisions and, therefore, it is argued, of primary significance. Moreover, care leavers have a particular sense of identity arising from their fractured experience of family life, which renders research into their own perspectives of particular value, as Samuels and Pryce (2008) attest in relation to fostered children.

4.2.2 *The pilot study*

There are particular methodological challenges in carrying out research involving care leavers, arising from the vulnerability of the participants, the size, mobility and geographical spread of the population, and their tendency to be socially excluded and stigmatised (Wigfall and Cameron, 2006). In order to assess these challenges and consider the best way in which they might be addressed in the main study, I carried out a pilot study (Driscoll, 2011; Driscoll, 2013a). A qualitative research strategy, in which attention is paid to the way in which individuals perceive the social reality of their lives, and in which theory is generated from data (Bryman, 2004), was regarded as most suitable. Qualitative methods enabled a detailed exploration of young people's perspectives to be undertaken in the context of intricate lives in which the personal and educational strands were interdependent (Trinder, 1996). Data was collected by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews with seven care leavers (three young women and four young men) aged sixteen to 20. Interviews focused on the following research themes:

1- the way in which young people leaving care negotiate a path from school to employment or further or higher education whilst embarking on independence and/or addressing issues relating to their care history;
2- the factors affecting choices made by young people, or the reasons for directions taken at critical points in their lives (including in particular the influence of birth families, and factors which encouraged or discouraged young people to engage in further or higher education and training); and
3- their own perceptions as to what interventions/services/type of provision they found or would find most supportive when pursuing further study or training.

In order to ensure that participants were not perceived by professionals as too vulnerable to participate, and to ensure that they all had a support network at hand should they need it, they were approached through their local authority Children in Care Council, by an invitation extended to members over the age of sixteen at a Council meeting. Since Care Councils are the means through which looked-after children contribute to decisions made by children's services authorities, it may be that the sample comprised young people who were more readily engaged by service providers. The research was conducted in accordance with the National Children's Bureau (NCB) *Guidelines for Research* (National Children's Bureau, 2009), which has since been revised

(Shaw et al., 2011). Approval was granted both by King's College London and by the local authority. Young people were given time to consider the information sheet, and it was made clear that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to, and that they could stop the interview at any time. A flexible approach was adopted to allow participants to focus on aspects of their experiences which they perceived to be most significant.

Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) in light of the power of this method to promote conceptualisation from participants' experiences (Shepherd et al., 2010). To foreground young people's voices, *in vivo* codes were preferred where appropriate during the initial phase of analysis. Following initial coding, axial coding was undertaken to relate initial codes to contexts, patterns of interaction and consequences, and selective coding was utilised to generate more abstract, theoretical categories. Access restraints and the small sample size meant that neither theoretical sampling nor theoretical saturation were possible. The themes arising from the pilot study included motivational issues related to set-backs experienced in young people's educational trajectories; the desire to be a 'normal' teenager in school; participants' feelings of being overwhelmed by their personal circumstances; the importance of consistent and supportive relationships; and a strong sense of self-reliance.

4.2.3 ***The main study***

The findings and lessons learnt from the pilot study informed the research questions and design of the main study. The longitudinal design of the main study arose from consideration of the different perspectives of young people of differing ages. Although only four years separated the oldest and youngest participants in the pilot study, it was apparent that those years were crucial to young people's life trajectories and that they themselves developed significantly in that period, which straddled the age of majority by two years each side. Although the reflections of participants in the pilot study on the way in which their academic and/or career trajectories had developed to date were valuable, it was clear that a longitudinal design would have greater explanatory power. I decided to follow young people's educational careers from Years 11-13, to incorporate critical events in their personal and educational lives, including pathway planning, Key

Stage 4 qualifications, the move to the leaving care team, and attainment of legal adulthood.

One of the *in vivo* themes from the pilot study was 'too many people', which related not only to disrupted care and education histories, but in particular to frequent changes in social work personnel, consistent with other literature (e.g. Cashmore, 2002). The pilot study was carried out in 2009, when the role of the designated teacher became statutory (Children and Young Persons Act 2008, section 20) and the evaluation of the Virtual School Head pilot was published (Berridge et al., 2009). I decided therefore, to include consideration of the potential of these roles to support young people through Key Stages 4 and 5.

Although the participants in the pilot study in many ways reflected the diversity of the care population (Rutter, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008) and were remarkably varied in their family backgrounds and histories, they were all white British. The three young women were from middle-class backgrounds, a relatively unusual characteristic amongst looked-after young people. For the main study, participants were drawn from two urban local authorities as well as accessed indirectly through professionals encountered as the study progressed, ensuring a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds (see Table 4.1).

The main aim of the study, to explore how looked-after young people experience educational transitions in Years 11-13 and how these transitions might best be supported, was addressed through four objectives:

1. To explore the key barriers to academic progress for looked-after young people at and beyond Key Stage 4 and how looked-after young people experience and navigate these barriers;
2. To consider the interdependence of young people's experiences in and before entering care and their educational outcomes in order better to understand the most effective means by which young people may be supported to reach their educational potential;
3. To assess the effectiveness of the virtual school head and designated teacher roles in promoting the engagement and progress of looked-after young people in further education and their participation in higher education; and

4. Critically to examine the current legislative and policy environment in the light of the findings from the study with a view to identifying how young people transitioning out of care might best be supported to fulfil their educational potential.

My initial intention was for a cohort of twenty young people to be recruited in Year 11 (aged fifteen or sixteen) through two or three local authority virtual schools and for interviews to be undertaken both with the young people and with their designated teachers in Year 11. In the event 21 young people and twelve designated teachers participated in the study. The young people were to be followed up with interviews in Year 12 and again in Year 13 in school, at college or at home, depending on their personal circumstances at that time. I anticipated that there would be significant attrition in young people's participation over the course of the study. The heads of the local authority virtual schools would also be interviewed. Inclusion of the perspectives of two sets of professionals enabled triangulation through comparison of data from different groups of people experiencing the operation of the virtual school system from different perspectives. As there remains little research on virtual schools and the work of designated teachers, the incorporation of professional participants is of value in its own right, but also ensured that there would be adequate data from the study even if the interviews with young people were not attainable in any numbers and/or depth.

4.3 **Study participants**

4.3.1 ***Access arrangements***

The decision to obtain access to young people through virtual schools also arose from the experiences of the pilot study, as discussed above, and the desire to achieve a sample that, if not 'representative' of the care population, at least would reflect its diversity. The number of children in England aged sixteen years and over who ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31st March 2010 (when the research was being planned) was 9,100 (DfE/NS, 2010a). There are however around 150 local authorities in England, so the average number of children ageing out of care in an authority in any given year is about 60. It was initially hoped that three large urban local authorities could be recruited for the study in order to generate enough care leavers to recruit a cohort of twenty. However, only two English metropolitan local authorities agreed to

facilitate the research through their virtual school heads. Agreement was obtained from each of these (see Appendices 2.2 and 2.3) and from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)(see Appendix 2.1) to gain access to young people in other local authorities, including where young people in the care of one authority were in school in another authority area. Approval was also obtained from the committee for 'high risk' research projects (RESC) at my university (see Appendix 2.4).

Since the research involved interviews with young people and their designated teachers, access for those attending school was arranged directly through schools by contacting the designated teacher for looked-after children and enclosing a letter to the head teacher, thereby according further protection. In order to access a range of young people to reflect the diverse profile of the looked-after population, the only formal selection criteria for the study were that young people were looked after and of an age at which they would normally be in Year 11 during the first year of the study. However, as set out below, various safeguards and filters ensured that very vulnerable young people were not approached.

The two local authorities engaged in the research are identified in this thesis by the fictitious names Riversmeet (virtual head Mr Brook) and Stonycross (virtual head Ms Mason). Both are located in urban areas with populations of over 300,000 (Greater London Authority Intelligence Unit, 2012). Initial negotiations were undertaken with Riversmeet, where meetings included discussion with the Head of Services for Looked After Children, and the arrangements for consent requirements were reached as a result of her involvement. Multiple safeguards were built into the access arrangements at local authority, school and individual level to ensure that very vulnerable young people were not included. My initial contact was made to designated teachers, but included a letter of information for head teachers to enable teachers to gain permission from their heads for themselves and the young people to participate in the research. If the designated teacher was prepared to invite the young person to participate, I sent an information and consent form to the young person through the teacher, and I also sent information sheets and consent forms and/or notice to their social worker and/or carer and/or parent(s), according to the age and care status of the young person and the agreement reached with their social worker as to the appropriate course of action. The detailed arrangements for informed consent by and on behalf of young people are discussed

under ethical considerations, at 4.5 below. These arrangements were readily agreed by Stonycross. Information sheet and consent form templates are set out at Appendix 2.5.

Both local authorities provided me with a list of contact details to enable me to approach designated teachers. However, the nature of the two lists was very different. Mr Brook at Riversmeet initially identified 26 young people, of whom thirteen were in school outside the borough, including some at very considerable distances, and one was not in school at all. After the start of the academic year these figures were revised to 35 young people, including young people placed all around the country, who had been originally excluded on grounds of impracticability. Of this full list, seventeen were shown as attending mainstream schools, three further education colleges, four pupil referral units, four special schools, one a hospital school, and one a mentoring agency, whilst three were not participating in any form of education and an additional two were awaiting a new placement. I was provided with young people's initials, gender and school, college or pupil referral unit attended, or indication that young people were not attending school or had no school placement. Attempts were made to contact designated teachers for all those who were on roll to schools or colleges except for the young person attending the hospital school. The virtual head wrote to head teachers, informing them that the research was supported by the local authority and asking them to encourage participation in the study

There was however considerable confusion over the accuracy of the records held by Riversmeet, which were updated on several occasions but proved to be surprisingly volatile and seemingly unreliable in many instances. In many cases no definitive response to the request was ever forthcoming, despite innumerable attempts. Four schools responded to state they did not have any looked-after children in Year 11, or not from that local authority, and in another three cases young people were reported not to be attending the school listed. Three schools declined to take part without consulting the young people, and three designated teachers or headteachers took the decision that the young people in question were too vulnerable to participate. One designated teacher from a special school stated that the young man in question could not be interviewed because he had 'no spoken language at all'. Another teacher telephoned to explain that the young woman at her school was very vulnerable and rarely attended school, and was expected to be admitted to hospital shortly for mental health concerns.

Only four young people were eventually interviewed from this list in Year 11, despite numerous attempts. Of the others, only seven young people were reported to have been asked by designated teachers and declined, while the remaining 24 were not asked for a variety of reasons, including that: the head or designated teacher considered it inappropriate (six); the school did not respond to repeated approaches (nine); or the young person was not in school (four). Six young people declined to take part, having been given the information sheet by their designated teachers. One interview had to be abandoned because it was not possible to make contact with the carer of a young person who was over sixteen.

Stonycross took a different approach, with the advisory teacher of the virtual school (Ms Crystal) providing me with a list of twelve young people whom she had identified as suitable to take part in the research, seven of whom were at school outside the borough. Ms Crystal had however already gained the consent of their designated teacher and social worker for the participation of these twelve young people and requested them to encourage the young people to take part. As a result, nine interviews were completed in Year 11 from the young people on this list. Of the remaining three, one was described as 'very unwell at the moment' by the designated teacher who considered it would be better not to approach her further; another had left the school to attend a special school but when traced declined to participate; and the third also declined to participate. Although access to these young people was considerably easier and more successful, it is unclear to what extent Ms Crystal or the teachers and social workers whom she approached acted as a primary filter to ensure that young people who were regarded as overly vulnerable were screened out at the outset.

When contact details were passed to me it also became apparent that in the case of both local authorities there were many more looked-after children in schools outside the authority with care for them than I had anticipated. Some of these schools also had young people from their own and other local authorities on roll. The ADCS approval for the research enabled me to pursue a further 'snowballing' approach, whereby, with the agreement of designated teachers, these young people could be included in the research without the need to obtain separate ethical approval from their local authority. Additionally, three young people were accessed through a charitable organization working with care leavers in two other local authorities. All the other safeguards,

including the arrangements for consent by, or notice to, young people's social workers (discussed further at 4.5.1 below), were complied with.

The designated teachers of all the young people who were in school were invited to participate and twelve teachers agreed to be interviewed. In addition to the virtual heads of Riversmeet and Stonycross, three more professionals in comparable positions within local authorities to which one or more of the young people were in care were interviewed to provide a contextual and strategic overview of the virtual school system. Where young people moved to further education colleges in Year 12, an appropriate officer from the college was invited to participate in the research at that stage and three such members of staff were interviewed. Twenty-one young people participated in a total of 45 interviews over the three years of the study, bringing the total number of interviews conducted to 65. Although the number of interviews conducted for this study is too large for a very detailed analytical approach, the size of the sample is reasonably well-suited to the aims of the study. Since this cohort of young people are regarded as a 'hard to reach' population and may move frequently, it was necessary to start with a reasonably large group in order to allow for some drop-outs, and it was also important to have a large enough sample to reflect to some degree the diversity of the looked-after population.

4.3.2 ***Gatekeeping issues***

Making contact with designated teachers proved to be extremely difficult. Often e-mails had to be sent to central school addresses and did not in many cases appear to reach the member of staff to whom they were addressed. No response was received to postal approaches. Most teachers were not contactable directly by telephone at least in the first instance, because school receptionists would not give out their direct numbers. Due to teaching commitments (my own and those of designated teachers), it was very difficult to contact teachers by telephone in any event. Where facilities were made available for messages to be left by telephone, it was rare for teachers to respond.

The four extracts from my records below illustrate some of the difficulties faced, including practical issues in establishing contact; differing professional responses to a request to invite a young person to participate in the research; and ethical issues. Not all failed attempts at communication were recorded.

1: Special school A

21/3/11 Email to [Designated Teacher]
1/4/11 Spoke to DT on phone: yp not doing GCSEs, sure there won't be a problem. DT will speak to head and get back to me on Mon – hopes to fix for start of next term
26/4/11 Left message asking DT to ring back
4/5/11 Spoke to DT: has spoken to HT who thinks because of girl in question it would not be appropriate – didn't think she would cope with it.

2: Grammar school B

19/10/10 All e-mails sent failed
9/11/10 email to general school address, asking for acknowledgement. No response.
30/11/10 Letter to [DT], enclosing letter to HT and information sheets
05/01/11 Spoke to DT on phone: does recall, pls resend by email; 1 LAC, [gave personal school email address]. Email address not accepted by my KCL or googlemail address, but confirmed by school as correct.
07/01/11 resent to general school email address
25/01/11 resent to individual school email address
18/02/11 left msg w scl asking [DT] to phone me
07/03/11 spoke on phone [to DT] – busy, will see him today & get back to me
08/03/11 email: LAC not interested

3: Meadowpond school

07/03/11 email office fta [Ms Teal]
24/03/11 yes 03/05/11 @11.30 JD to get consents and confirm nearer time
24/03/11 asked [Riversmeet] for dob and SW and care status: [2 names given for SW]
28/03/11 email to [SW] cc Mr Brook w info and consent forms – asked to sign and return
08/04/11 consent form signed by [SW] returned by email
26/04/11 Notice to carers
27/04/11 [Carer (ex-journalist)] rang while on train – phoned her back @5pm. No one has asked [Michael] – [Ms Teal] said it was for SW – but [Michael] has only met him twice. She felt many SWs were not professionals (also teachers…) and many f-carers were in her view v profnl & did fantastic job which went unrecognised. [Michael] Asperger's, articulate but naïve, now getting even more literal in interpretation. Said no imm. but she had persuaded him – I said needs to be vol & she said he didn't really need persuading as such but to come round to idea. Will chat happily. Needs to know no right/wrong answers. Said I should

be asking f/carers…They have a lot to offer & know the yp better than teachers/SWs. Added would have adopted [Michael] but came to realise they would not get support he needs.

4: Redhouse Pupil Referral Unit

08/11/10 emailed through their web pages – 3.30: copied to my kcl account a few minutes later
30/11/10 phoned @ 9.45, spoke to [Ms Carmine] but has to deal with student urgently, pls phone back in about ½ hr
Phone again 10.50 – [Ms Carmine] not sure if yp suitable – all over place, i/v not at home – cld be @ schl –think that's what he'd want, has just had LAC review. Me to send details to [email address].
02/12/10 email sent
05/01/11 phoned. LAC may not want to - & wld want [Ms Carmine] there – she sick end of last term, he start of this, phone back on Fri
07/01/11 still sick
14/01/11 still sick, try again 21/01
21/01/11 phone call
24/01/11 phone call
25/01/11 phone call to [Ms Carmine] – he's shrugging 'I s'pose'; 'I'll do it if you like'. Left email address & agreed I will check before coming
25/01/11 Email to [SW] cc [VH] re parental status
27/01/11 phone call from [SW] – happy for i/v to go ahead. Confirmed 15, vol. acc – but she hasn't been able to make contact with M[um] – M[um] has completely abandoned [Niall] it seems. Carer is kin though – confirmed I would give notice to her – [address]. (Agreed no contact to M[um] as can't)
01/02/11 Spoke briefly to carer on phone (abt to drive) & left msg later on phone, sent hard copy in post.
08/02/11 email from [another member of staff at Redhouse] "we have had a few problems with [Niall] for the last few weeks, [Niall] is not in school for the moment". Mtg with carer today in school and SW. Suggested I check Thurs as "we will have to assess [Niall's] state of mind".
08/02/11 replied to say I would call Thurs/Fri
10/02/11 No reply @ 4.15
11/02/11 Called –spoke to [Ms Carmine] – [N] not in today
Agreed I would contact after ½ term
07/03/11 Fixed for Thurs 31/3 @ 10.15 – JD to remind @ 11 on Wed 30th, but will keep in unless [N] dna. 20m will be tops with [Ms Carmine] there – 10m without – can't sit still.

'Gatekeepers' such as teachers have an important role in protecting children and young people from potential harm (Masson, 2000), but they may also be inclined to 'err on the side of caution' where vulnerable children are concerned (Cree et al., 2002: page 50),

and can 'use their position to censor children and young people' (Masson, 2000; page 36), including to exclude young people who might not behave conformably (Crow et al., 2006). In a review of research studies involving adopted or fostered children, Murray (2005) describes gatekeeping practice as reflecting 'the pervasiveness of a protectionist model of children and young people over a citizen-with-rights model' (page 64), although in that review, as in this study, it is clear that in many cases professionals had good reason for taking such a stance. However in general in this study, social workers appeared willing to allow young people more autonomy than did their teachers, perhaps reflecting differences in professional roles and relationships with children. One social worker from the Valleys local authority, for example, explained her lack of response to my initial letter as arising from her view that, as the young person was over sixteen, it was her (sole) decision. In a study of researchers working with children and young people, Heath et al. (2007) concluded that in institutions such as schools which separate children from society as a whole there is a tendency to construct young people as incompetent to make decisions for themselves, resulting in the conflation of the right to grant access with the right to consent, a concern considered further below in relation to voluntary participation.

4.3.3 ***Participating young people***

The twenty-one young people participating in the project were a diverse group, in keeping with the looked-after population as a whole. There were 12 boys (57 per cent) and 9 girls (43 per cent), close to the gender ratio of 56 per cent male and 44 per cent female nationally at the time the fieldwork commenced (DfE/NS, 2011a). Only nine were white British, with the sample reflecting the diverse populations of the geographical areas in which the participants lived. Of the eighteen whose care status was known, ten (56 per cent) were the subject of care orders, compared with 60 per cent in the looked-after children population as a whole in England, and seven were voluntarily accommodated, compared with 31 per cent of all looked-after children, with one having been remanded into care. Despite the difficulties in access therefore, the group reflects the constituency of looked-after young people reasonably well. As can be seen from Table 4.1, thirteen of the young people attended mainstream schools (marked M in the table) in Year 11, three were in Pupil Referral Units (PRU), two attended special schools (S) and three (accessed through the charitable organisation by which they were accommodated) were not in education at all.

Table 4.1: young people participants

Name* (gender)	Ethnicity	Into care	School Year 11	Special needs etc.
Adam (M)	White	Year 5	Woodhall M	
Bashir (M)	Asian DLR†	Year 8	Woodhall M	EAL
Callum (M)	White	End Year 7	Woodhall M	Offending
Devora (F)	White	Year 9	Ravenscourt M	Orphan
Elliott (M)	Mixed	Year 7	Fairfields M	
Farouk (M)	Asian UASC‡	Year 7	King's M	EAL
Gilroy (M)	Mixed	End Year 7	Clifton M	Offending, speech impediment
Habib (M)	Asian refugee	Year 5	PRU	EAL, ADHD
Imogen (F)	Black	Year 4	Queen's M	
Jacinda (F)	Mixed	Year 1	Queen's M	
Kayla (F)	Black	Year 1	Garden House M	
Luis (M)	Mixed	Year 2	The Grove S (EBD)	Long-term support
Michael (M)	White	Age 4	Meadowpond M	Asperger's Syndrome SEN
Niall (M)	White	Year 8	Redhouse PRU	Literacy SEN
Ollie (M)	White	?	Stonehouse S	Physical & learning disabilities SEN
Priya (F)	Asian	Age 13 (Year 8/9)	M	Teenage mother
Qadira (F)	Black	Age 12/13 (Year 7/8)	Not in school (PRU)	Secure care home
Riley (M)	White	Age 15 (Yr 10/11)	Seaview PRU	Offending
Sofia (F)	Black/mixed UASC‡	Age 16 (Year 11)	Fairfields M	EAL
Tasmin (F)	White	Age 8	Fairfields M	
Unity (F)	White	Age 11	Not in school (PRU)	Secure unit 4 times

*All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and schools

†DLR = Discretionary Leave to Remain
‡UASC = Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child

It is difficult to draw conclusions about any distinctions between young people who agreed to participate and those that declined, because, as set out above, in many cases the invitation to participate was not passed on by the school, and in others the school took the decision that participation was not appropriate. Some designated teachers felt that the exercise would be of benefit to the young person in question and therefore took pains to encourage their participation. Only one young person (Verity) communicated a decision not to participate directly to me, having agreed to speak to me on the telephone at her social worker's request. Verity said she was not interested in education and did not need help 'with any of that'. It is reasonable to speculate that those who participated were likely to be more conscious of the importance of education to their future life prospects and willing to engage at least with some professionals. Where participants did not take part in follow-up interviews it was often the case that they were difficult to access because they had left school and ceased to engage with social workers.

The total number of young participants came to 21 (and not twenty as intended) because when I visited Unity in the first year of the project, her key worker met with her first and reported that she was in a bad mood and did not wish to speak to anyone, possibly as a result of withdrawing from drugs taken the previous night. I abandoned that interview, but the following year Unity was keen to speak to me, perhaps because two of her peers had done so the previous year and had rearranged interviews with me.

It was not possible to meet with all of the young people each year. Table 4.2 shows the pattern of interviews carried out, comprising eighteen in Year 11, seventeen in Year 12 and ten in Year 13. Nine young people participated in all three interviews.

Table 4.2: interviews undertaken over the three years of the study

Name* (gender)	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	No. of interviews
Adam (M)	✓	✓	✓	3
Bashir (M)	✓	✓	✓	3
Callum (M)	✓	✓	✓	3
Devora (F)	✓	✓	✓	3
Elliott (M)	✓	-	-	1
Farouk (M)	✓	✓	-	2
Gilroy (M)	✓	✓	-	2
Habib (M)	✓	✓	✓	3
Imogen (F)	✓	✓	✓	3
Jacinda (F)	✓	✓	✓	3
Kayla (F)	✓	✓	✓	3
Luis (M)	✓	✓	-	2
Michael (M)	✓	-	-	1
Niall (M)	✓	-	-	1
Ollie (M)	✓	✓	-	2
Priya (F)	-	✓	-	1
Qadira (F)	✓	✓	✓	3
Riley (M)	-	✓	✓	2
Sofia (F)	✓	-	-	1
Tasmin (F)	✓	✓	-	2
Unity (F)	-	✓	-	1
Total:	**18**	**17**	**10**	**45**

*All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants

4.3.4 ***Professional participants***

4.3.4.1 The designated teachers

The teacher participants came from twelve institutions in eight local authorities, comprising seven mainstream schools, including one academy; one private and two maintained special schools; and two alternative providers (or pupil referral units), one maintained and one private. All the mainstream schools included sixth-form provision. The three state-funded non-mainstream institutions took young people to the age of sixteen, but the two private institutions included young people up to seventeen and nineteen respectively. Of the seven mainstream schools, two were faith schools, (one Christian and one Jewish) and two were girls' schools. All five of the non-mainstream

institutions accepted a mixed intake, although the two private schools had only boys on roll at the time of the research. All the designated teachers interviewed had experience of young people looked after by a number of different local authorities, enabling them to compare practice between local authority areas: Ms Olive dealt with nine different authorities.

The experience of participants in the designated teacher role varied widely. Two were new in the post at the start of that academic year, while the most experienced post-holders in the mainstream schools had been designated teachers for nine and ten years respectively. Consequently, the number of looked-after children that participants had worked with ranged from three to around 150. Most participants held a senior post within the school hierarchy. Only one was part-time, and he was semi-retired from a senior management position. All had reduced teaching loads or undertook no teaching in light of their additional responsibilities. Of the non-mainstream institutions, the head-teacher took responsibility for looked-after children in three institutions, and a deputy head in the other two, although the private institutions did not recognise a named designated teacher role as such. All the non-mainstream institutions had higher proportions of looked-after children on roll than the mainstream schools. Therefore, even where the post was not officially designated, staff often had considerable experience and expertise in the education of looked-after young people. Table 4.3 summarises the roles and experience of the teacher participants.

Table 4.3: Designated teachers

Name* (school)	**Post held**	**Experience** No of LAC (time in post)	**School profile**
Mr Black (Ravenscourt)	Assistant head-teacher	3 (4 years)	Mixed Voluntary Aided faith school
Mr Brown (Woodhall)	Part-time, pastoral leadership role	c150 (10 years)	Mixed Academy
Ms Carmine (Redhouse)	Head	2 (2 years)	Private mixed alternative education provision
Ms Coral (Seaview)	Deputy head	9 (2 years)	Mixed Pupil Referral Unit
Mr Green (Fairfields)	Assistant head-teacher	10/11 (18 months)	Mixed Community school
Mr Grey (Stonehouse)	Head	c140 (28 years)	Mixed special school, learning and behavioural needs
Ms Gold (Queen's)	Assistant head-teacher	7 (5 years)	Girls' Community school
Ms Olive (The Grove)	Head	c70 (7 years)	Private mixed special school, Educational/ Behavioural/ Social needs
Ms Rose (Garden House)	Inclusion and learning support manager	4 (6 months)	Girls' Community school
Ms Tan (Sunnyhill)	Head of Care	c150 (15 years)	Mixed Community school Educational/Behavioural/ Social needs
Ms Teal (Meadowpond)	Inclusion co-ordinator (senior management)	25-30 (9 years)	Mixed Foundation school
Ms White (Clifton)	Inclusion leader, upper school	5 (6 months)	Mixed Voluntary Aided faith school

*pseudonyms are used for teachers and schools to maintain anonymity

4.3.4.2 Staff in further education colleges

Since there is no statutory or even conventional model for the oversight of care leavers within further education colleges, responsibility is held at different levels and through different roles and it was difficult to find out whom to approach in colleges. At Millbank College, Ms Willow was Learner Services Manager, which included responsibility for the safeguarding team of ten members of staff. The latter was a relatively new innovation, around five years old and Ms Willow's background was unconventional, as she explained: 'I'm a mum whose children had a lot of issues… I've got life experience'.

Ms Maple at Eastside College had also come into the role because of her wider experience, in this case as a foster carer. She had worked for the college originally in the business unit, engaged as an outreach worker for community education and moved on to work as an 'opportunities coach', a role introduced two to three years earlier at Eastside College to motivate students who might be slipping behind or struggling to engage and to put in place appropriate support. At the time of the interview she had only just taken on the additional role of 'designated coach' for looked-after children and teenage parents. She explained that the designated coach role should have been her full-time work, but that she was still covering as an opportunities coach as well. Ms Oak at Forest Hill College was the most senior of the three officers in further education colleges, as Director of Learning Services.

The three colleges were at very different stages in the way in which they identified and supported looked-after young people, as will be discussed further in section 6.4.4. Ms Willow was unable to identify the number of looked-after children on roll at Millbank College and had been unaware of Imogen's status before I had contacted her. The college was in the process of addressing this issue in order to ensure that the 16-19 bursary scheme was appropriately administered. Ms Maple was responsible for sixty enrolled looked-after young people at Eastside College, but stated that this figure had reduced by about a quarter from the start of the academic year to the time of the interview in early March, which she attributed primarily to non-attendance or young people moving out of the area. Ms Oak at Forest Hill College stated that, of the 4,500 full-time students aged sixteen to eighteen at the college, 45 (1 per cent) were looked-after, and that the retention rate that year for looked-after children and care leavers was 90 per cent.

4.3.4.3 Virtual school heads and staff

Of the five staff interviewed from virtual schools, three were virtual heads, one was employed as a 'consultant teacher' and the fifth was a secondary senior advisor with responsibility for looked-after children. Four of the five participants came from urban local authorities: the fifth was employed by an authority in a largely affluent and white middle-class area. Four had extensive teaching experience, one as a head-teacher, one as a deputy head, one as an assistant head and designated teacher for child protection and looked-after children, and the fourth progressing to the local authority's behaviour management service. The fifth virtual head was an educational psychologist

by background. The local authorities had different structural arrangements, with one virtual school being part of the School Improvement Service, another within the education department, and the others placed in Looked After Children services or social care, although in one case the work was contracted out to a private company, which employed the virtual head-teacher. In order to ensure that the local authorities are not identified, further details about the post-holders are withheld. Table 4.4 shows the professional backgrounds of the virtual school staff who participated in the study, together with details of the structural arrangements in their local authority, their experience and the numbers of children for whom they were responsible.

Table 4.4: Virtual school participants

Name, local authority*	**Professional experience**	**Structure**	**Virtual school time and role**	**Virtual school**
Ms Lea, The Valleys	18/19 years teaching, LA behaviour management adviser	In CLA service, delivered by private company	11 years, virtual head or equivalent. Part-time	Up to age 16. c200 children, high proportion out of borough, 17 staff before cuts
Mr Steel, Ironbridge	25 years teaching, deputy head	In School Improvement Service	2.5 years @ .4, lead officer for LAC	Very recently extended to 18, c240 children, c1/6 out of borough, total staff 2 FTE
Mr Brook, Riversmeet	Educational psychologist, trained as teacher	Multi-agency team in LAC services in CSD	3 years @ .5, virtual head (but set up multi-agency team 10 years ago)	Extending over 18, c310 children. Staff: Ed psych, education officer.
Ms Mason, Stonycross	Teaching background, inc. HT 18 years, challenging school	In corporate parenting, in social care	3 years @ .4 virtual head	Up to age 16, seeking 18. C 300 children. Staff: 4 people, 2 x .4, inc. VH, advisory teacher, ed. Psych.
Ms Ford, Crossbridge	Teacher to retirement age, assistant head and designated for child protection and LAC	In multi-disciplinary virtual school leadership team within Education Department	2 years @ .4 Consultant teacher, secondary	Up to 18+. 100-110 children. Staff: VH @ .1, 2 consultants each @.4, primary and secondary.

*All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and local authorities

4.4 Data collection and analysis

4.4.1 *The interview guides*

Interviewing has been a central tool in the growth and widening range of educational research in the last century (Tierney and Dilley, 2001). Tierney and Dilley identify four primary domains of interviewing in educational research, three of which are applicable to this study: the policy context; understanding the social contexts of learning; and interviewing oriented to educational reform. Research interviews are commonly regarded as a form of professionally-directed conversations (Kvale, 1996; Charmaz, 2006). Interviews are more usually utilized to gather data when the research is concerned with participants' perspectives or interpretations, rather than with the collection of incontrovertible facts (Warren, 2001). Such a function was appropriate in this research.

The potential value of interview data has been subject to significant and sustained questioning in recent decades (Hammersley, 2008). Hammersley mounts a robust defence of the interview as a research method, concluding that what is needed is '[s]cepticism, in the sense of a generally heightened level of methodological caution, rather than sustained epistemological doubt' (2008: page 99). However, he expresses concern that qualitative researchers have tended to be over-reliant on interviews and highlights the importance of careful consideration of the use made of such data and the need for a reflective approach in its analysis, including recognition that both the interviewee's account and the interviewer's interpretation will be underpinned by their own assumptions and values. He criticises the 'neglect of contextual variation – of the way in which people respond to variation in socio-cultural context – and of scope for change in people's orientation over time' (Hammersley 2008: page 30). The longitudinal study design, which was adopted to investigate the experiences of looked-after young people and the way in which they can best be supported to negotiate the transition to further education or training, went some way to mitigate the second of these concerns. Hammersley also recommends triangulation of data from varied sources, which in this study was achieved through interviews with three different sets of participants (young people, staff in schools and colleges, and local authority virtual school staff). The longitudinal design enabled a relationship to be built with young people over time, which may also have helped to minimise reactivity to the researcher as well as facilitating the conduct of interviews in different physical contexts (e.g. at home, at school and in a public place such as a café). In some cases, it was possible to gather

school data in order to compare young people's accounts of their educational expectations with their actual performance.

The interview process was complicated by the varying social status, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of participants and their engagement in the research, an issue of relevance to the first of Hammersley's criticisms. Many commentators warn of the 'researcher effect' in interviews, namely the likelihood that the researcher's age, gender, ethnicity and (perceived) social status will affect the responses given by interviewees. It was difficult to develop sensitive forms of adjustment to diminish these concerns in the context of interviews with such a varied group of participants. Many of the interviews with young people were cross-cultural in the sense that the participant and I did not share a common cultural background and the common assumptions that arise from that. However, I had very little advance knowledge, if any, of the histories of the young people in the cohort, which were extremely varied. When visiting young people in their foster homes, I was aware that I might not be apprised of certain traditions or religious customs or even social expectations. Although this was in many ways not ideal, and made me conscious of the increased barriers to establishing rapport with participants from cultures other than my own (Ryen, 2001), young people were likely to be more relaxed at home than in school and such circumstances perhaps helped to realign the power imbalance between researcher and researched.

There were other practical considerations. It was in most cases not possible to dress differently for interviews with young people and teachers in the first phase of the research because both were generally arranged for the same day at school. Each was aware that I would also be talking to the other. No participants expressed concern that I would inform other participants known to them of what they had said, as an assurance of confidentiality was clearly given in the information sheets (with an explicit exception in relation to child protection concerns), but it is likely that young participants in schools were more guarded in the way in which they spoke to me. Certainly young people were in general more relaxed and appeared to speak more freely when interviewed in a different setting than the school environment, although many were also more open in the later interviews than in the first one, regardless of the venue.

Interviews were recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriber. Only one young person at first demurred and said that she was reluctant to be recorded, citing

embarrassment at the way she would sound, but she was quickly persuaded to do so after discussion of the time that would be required to note everything she said by hand. Young people quite often declined to answer questions about their personal circumstances, but never queried whether their anonymity would be assured. Professionals on the other hand were quite likely to pause to check they would not be identified in relation to a comment before answering a question, particularly if their answer could be construed as critical of their employer or management. Often professionals started talking and provided valuable data before the interview started, whilst both young people and professionals on numerous occasions provided more data after the recorder had been switched off, sometimes appearing to evidence that they no longer felt the need to take care as to what they said and how it was expressed.

Not only is the interview process vulnerable to the nature of the interaction between researcher and researched and the context in which it takes place, but interpretation of interview data is dependent on the way in which the researcher re-contextualises the data in analysis (Briggs, 2001). Briggs argues that the conception of the interview as 'space for the articulation of individual perspectives' is 'largely illusory, in that interviews are structured by power asymmetries and by conventions that produce discursively complex material that is geared toward the institutional ends for which it was created' (page 919). As such, he cautions that interviews can readily contribute to the naturalisation of social inequalities and urges the importance of a critical perspective at all stages of the process. Accordingly, particular attention was paid in analysis and writing to endeavouring to ensure that the findings genuinely represented the perspectives of participants. The extract from my field notes from Habib's Year 13 interview below demonstrates the complexity of interpreting the data of young people in the light of the views of professionals working with them, my own preconceptions and theirs, and the circumstances in which interviews were undertaken.

> 11-02-13 Previous SW: H now in leaving care team, carer's partner passed away, so about to leave anyway last year, carer has cancer but in remission. H was 'getting quite difficult'. More contact with birth M – need to go into semi-ind.
>
> New SW: gave H's mob no and I fixed direct.
>
> Mentor at college: attendance up and down but over 80% (86%). Had professionals' meeting recently: H needs a lot of support.

> 17-04-13 Flats above money-lending shop, corner smelt of urine, but central location and nice inside [another tenant answered door and let me up to H's front door]. Seems to be in independent accommodation (may be supported but on own in flats with general public, not other yp). H dna, I phoned, v odd conversation on friend's phone.
>
> V apologetic text from H later stating he 'fucked up', and then phone call: left key at house and had to go to mate's to get in. Rearranged for 29/4.
>
> 29-04-13 Seemed to have black eye and kept hand over nose all through interview, but denied any problem and I did not push. Think he said not at college because heavy night the night before [but I ask to arrange interviews around educational commitments].
>
> After tape switched off, H asked if what he had said was OK as felt he was 'cussing you' (ie me). Explained again I am independent, but it seemed he was worried about being over-critical of LA.

These field notes illustrate a number of the difficulties in the interpretation of data in a study such as this, including differences in professionals' perceptions of young people; the potential influence of professionals' views on the interpretation of data provided by young people; uncertainty over how truthful or frank participants are in interview; the extent to which responses may reflect how young people are feeling at the time of the interview; and the degree to which interviewees might be inclined to tailor the information they provide in response to their perceptions of the possible role or expectations of the interviewer. A cautious approach was therefore adopted towards analysis, using the field notes to reflect on young people's changing engagement or attitudes over time; considering comparisons between the accounts of different young people and between those of young people and professionals; and drawing on my previous professional experience.

4.4.2 *Interviews with young people*

Building on the pilot study undertaken with care leavers, the initial student interviews addressed their experience of school and stability in education and in care; the subjects they were studying, the reasons for their choices and their plans for the future; sources of advice in making decisions about their future education and career; sources of help for school work both in school and outside; and their views on the value of further and/or higher education, including proposals to increase the upper age of compulsory education to eighteen. Additionally students were asked specifically about access to one-

to-one tuition (for which specific funding has now been withdrawn) and the Personal Education Allowance (now replaced by the Pupil Premium); their experience of the Personal Education Plan (PEP) and Pathway Plan; and the extent and nature of their relationship with the designated teacher. At the second interview, young people were asked to look back at the transition they had just negotiated and consider the extent to which they had realised their ambitions to date; to reappraise their future plans; and to discuss with hindsight whether the extent to which they considered they had received adequate support in making decisions about their future and in negotiating any transitions in their personal life or education. An adapted version of the interview guide was used for young people not in education, to enable a sensitive discussion about the reasons for their disengagement from education, the barriers they perceived to re-engagement and their plans for the future. The final interview considered their further plans for the future and the support they had received in their sixth form or college as appropriate, both in educational terms and also in relation to wider concerns such as housing and financial stability that may impact upon the educational and career paths they take. Interview guides for young people are provided at Appendix 3.1-3.4.

4.4.3 *Interviews with professionals*

Interviews with teachers covered participants' primary role within the school, their experience in the designated role, and the principal issues arising. Participants were asked their views on the value of the role and the nature of their relationships with the looked-after children and their carers and with social work colleagues. The support proffered to them by the school and local authority, and particularly through the virtual school system, was also covered. Specific questions were asked about their role in encouraging high aspirations amongst looked-after children and supporting transition to further education, including the advantages and disadvantages for young people of remaining in school or transferring to further education college. This guide (at Appendix 3.5) was adapted for professionals carrying out a similar role at further education colleges.

Virtual school heads were asked about the numbers and profile of the looked-after children in their virtual school, the nature and extent of their contact with designated teachers, and the primary issues and concerns that were brought to them by designated teachers for their advice. Their experience and role in supporting the transition of

looked-after children to further education or training was also discussed, for example through liaison with further education colleges. Their thoughts were sought on current and forthcoming challenges to fulfilment of their role in enabling looked-after young people to reach their educational potential, as well as likely changes in the future, arising from the implementation of recent policy changes and government and local authority funding cuts. The interview guide for virtual school staff is set out at Appendix 3.6.

4.5 **Ethical considerations**

Research with adult participants complied with the guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004; 2011). Research with young people was conducted in accordance with the National Children's Bureau *Guidelines for Research* published in 2009 (National Children's Bureau, 2009) and since superseded by Shaw et al. (2011). All participants were assured anonymity. It was made clear to participants in information sheets that participation was entirely voluntary, that they could choose not to respond to any questions they would prefer not to answer, and that they could withdraw themselves and/or data about them from the research at any time up until a given date. As noted above, approval letters, the letter to gatekeeping head-teachers, information sheets and consent forms are provided at Appendix 2. More accessible information sheets were devised for two young people with special educational needs (at Appendix 2.8), and these were read to the young people in advance of the interviews. Young people were given a voucher worth £15 at the end of each interview to thank them for their time and assistance in the study.

Before commencing the study I obtained enhanced disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau (001293316593, issued 28th August 2010). No issues could arise in relation to disclosure of child protection concerns by designated teachers because they are the appropriate referral professional for such concerns within schools, and likewise virtual school heads are part of the local authority children's services department. Young people were informed in the information sheets that

> [e]verything you say will be treated as confidential, unless I am worried that there is a risk of harm to you or another young person, in which case I will inform the designated teacher or your social worker, as you prefer.

I planned that the young person would be informed of this course of action and asked to agree to it unless this was not possible for reasons relating to the safety of a young person or the researcher. Should a young person become distressed, the interview would be halted and either the designated teacher, the named social worker or key worker contacted, as preferred by the young person. Although some questions related to their relationships with their birth family and personal experiences, these were limited as far as possible and young people were reminded that they did not have to answer any questions they were not comfortable with before more personal or sensitive questions were asked. No issues of concern in relation to confidentiality arose in the course of the fieldwork.

There were three issues that required particular care to ensure ethical research practice, namely informed consent by adults on behalf of young people participating in the study; ensuring young people's participation was genuinely voluntary; and the relationship between the researcher and participants. These are considered in turn in the following section.

4.5.1 *Informed consent and young people's participation*

All four organisations from which ethical approval was obtained for the study agreed that young people aged sixteen or over could give informed consent to participate themselves, without the additional consent of an adult. The negotiation of access to young people in schools through virtual head-teachers and designated teachers, who were well-placed to assess their suitability to take part in such research, ensured that very vulnerable young people would be identified and could be filtered out of participation if professionals considered it inappropriate for them to participate. Additional safeguards were built in for young people over the age of sixteen through the condition that notice would be given to the young person's carer and his or her social worker, with provision of my contact details to enable them to raise any concerns they may have about the young person's participation, and as a matter of courtesy.

The local authorities required that informed consent was to be obtained from participants aged fifteen, but that it must also be given by their social worker if they were in care, or by someone with parental responsibility if they were voluntarily accommodated, subject to the view of the social worker as to the appropriateness of

that course of action. In addition, notice was given to young people's carers. This requirement raises significant issues of principle and practice. Those pertaining to children's rights are beyond the scope of this thesis, but I have argued elsewhere that children who are competent to do so should be entitled to decide for themselves whether they wish to participate in social research (Driscoll, 2012). Here I will confine the discussion to consideration of the practical implications of these restrictions.

For these purposes, there were three categories of fifteen year-olds within the sample: (i) those in care, (ii) those who were voluntarily accommodated and with no person in the UK with parental responsibility for them, and (iii) those who were voluntarily accommodated but had parents in the UK who held parental responsibility for them.

Where young people were aged fifteen and in the care of the local authority, it was agreed that both the child and his or her social worker should be required to provide informed consent. In addition to acquiring social worker consent, I gave notice to carers to allow them to raise any concerns they might have.

A number of young people fell into the second category, with no person in the UK holding parental responsibility for them. Devora, for example, had experienced the death of both her parents and was living with a relative, while Farouk was an unaccompanied asylum-seeker, and both were accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. For these young people, there was no alternative but to rely solely on their own informed consent, but notice was also given to their carers and social workers to ensure that any cause for concern about their proposed participation could be raised with me.

The category of children aged fifteen who had parents available in the UK and for whom the local authority did not hold parental responsibility raised the most sensitive issues. Young people who are voluntarily accommodated, rather than subject to a care order, are likely to have left home relatively late in their childhood, as a result of family changes such as the advent of a step-parent into the home, or after a breakdown in relations with the caring parent, such that they are forced or choose to leave home. In these circumstances it may be inappropriate or at the very least insensitive to require parental approval for a young person to participate in research. For example, Niall's mother had, in his social worker's words, 'completely abandoned him'. In such cases, therefore, it was agreed that I should seek the advice of the social worker as to whether

(1) written parental consent should be obtained, (2) parents should be given notice of the proposed research and an opportunity to raise concerns, or (3) parents should not be given notice of the research. Again, notice of the research was given to the young person's carer, providing them with an opportunity to raise any concerns they might have.

This process was further complicated by the fact that parental responsibility is held corporately rather than vesting in the individual child's social worker. There was often a fast turnover of social work staff and direct contact between looked-after children and their social workers was in some cases relatively infrequent. On a number of occasions in the course of this research, the appropriateness of relying on either the consent of the social worker or their advice as to whether parental consent should be sought was queried by designated teachers and carers. Habib's designated teacher, for example, commented that he had recently been allocated two social workers in quick succession, and she did not think he had even met his current one. In practice, this arrangement caused significant administrative difficulties and delay in contacting social workers and/or parents and obtaining their written consent in advance of interviews. In some cases, a similar concern arose in giving notice to the social workers of young people aged sixteen, because in most local authorities young people move to the Leaving Care team at sixteen, entailing allocation of a new social worker.

Looked-after children are a particularly vulnerable group for whom the state has taken responsibility, and it is right that their local authority should be concerned primarily with their protection. In this study, however, the multiple layers of gatekeeper approval and informed consent requirements led to significant difficulties in accessing participants. It is difficult to assess the impact on the profile of the young people participating, because young people not in school were accessed through other avenues in other authorities, and some designated teachers – including some from special schools – were much more willing to approach young people than others. However, it was certainly the case that whether the young person was given an opportunity to participate depended less on their particular vulnerabilities than on the stance taken by those in authority over them.

Similar experiences of other researchers appear to be causing increasing concern in social research. In their research with the children of drug-abusing parents, Barnard and

Barlow (2003) described how the 'processes of making contact and interviewing these children and young people underlined both the many sensitivities surrounding this issue and the degree to which it is shrouded by silences that make it difficult to hear the voice of the child' (page 46). The practical difficulties they encountered in accessing children through adult gatekeepers and the perceived requirement for parental consent for children's participation resulted in a sample that they described as 'entirely opportunistic' (page 46). In the case of looked-after children, multiple consent requirements may also contribute to a pattern of over-protection that operates to exclude such young people from making decisions for themselves and thereby denies them the opportunity to develop the necessary competencies for autonomous adulthood (Leeson, 2007).

4.5.2 ***Voluntary participation?***

In addition to instances where professionals ruled young people out of participation without consulting them, the process of negotiating access to potential participants also raised concerns around whether decisions might be being made for young people in favour of their participation, or whether they felt genuinely able to opt out of participation. Whilst young people are more likely to agree to research which is introduced to them by an adult they trust (Cree et al., 2002), at times it was unclear from the correspondence with teachers whether young people had been asked whether they would like to participate, or were expected to do so by their designated teacher. One response (from Ms Rose) read 'I have spoken to our head teacher and we have agreed that [Kayla] and I should take part in the project'. This led me to deliberate on the extent to which young people in a school environment have the opportunity, or feel genuinely able, to decline a request made by a senior member of school staff.

Heath et al. (2007) found that researchers, although often uncomfortable with the practice of gatekeepers, are unlikely to challenge them, but as Conolly (2008) points out, it is difficult for researchers to do so, given their dependence on them for the success of the project. I found that it was not usually possible to examine the reality of such practice. Most interviews in the first year of the study took place at school and were arranged through the designated teacher. I was careful to ensure that teachers were sent information sheets to give to potential participants so that they could have some time to consider whether they wished to take part. I also made sure that young people

understood that I was not connected to the school, that they did not have to take part, and that no adverse consequences would flow from declining to do so, but it was doubtless more difficult for young people to choose not to take part once I was at school and the designated teacher had summoned them to the interview room.

Relationships between designated teachers and young people appeared to vary greatly, from a very supportive and trusting relationship, to a more distant one in which the designated teacher undertook their statutory role, but the young person was more comfortable taking advice or asking for help from other members of staff. Feedback from some staff in relation to young people who had declined to participate made it clear that those teachers had given young people the information sheets, time to think about participation and to discuss it if they wished, and a genuine choice as to whether they wished to participate. In other cases, it appeared likely that the hierarchical nature of staff-pupil relationships in school and the culture of the school environment governing pupil conformity was likely to have been influential (David et al., 2001; Gallagher et al., 2010).

Notwithstanding these misgivings, in the interviews it was clear that most young people were adept at confining their answers to areas they were willing to discuss and in communicating when a line of questioning was unwelcome. I bore in mind that negotiating consent is an ongoing process (Gallagher, 2008; Renold et al., 2008) and that the researcher must be alive to areas of sensitivity which young people may indicate through verbal or non-verbal communication that they do not wish pursued. Young people did so either directly, or by answering very shortly or vaguely or through their body language (not making eye contact, and fidgeting or fiddling with their clothing or phone). There were frequent occasions in the current study when I chose not to pursue a line of questioning about the young person's care history, because it was not central to the research topic and they indicated discomfort in discussing it, something Cree et al. (2002) also experienced when interviewing young people with a parent or carer with HIV. The implications of such a course are considered further in my discussion of the findings arising from interviews with young people.

4.5.3 ***The relationship between researcher and researched***

On several occasions I found my role as a researcher challenging to maintain or even justify. It was in some senses unfortunate that the timing of the project was such that

the young people were in the same school year as my elder daughter, which made me acutely aware of the similarities and differences between the life experiences of my own children and those I was interviewing, and also that I was likely unconsciously to have expectations that were not necessarily appropriate for the young people I was interviewing, including, for example, the way in which I might expect them to relate to me. There was some evidence that my age and gender did affect the way in which young people expressed themselves in interview as this extract demonstrates:

> if you have a shit attendance – sorry…*That's fine*.…if you have a shit attendance and you don't bother to come in they won't give you a flat in this area, because you don't really need it (Habib).

In other respects my familiarity with this age-group was perhaps an advantage. In the event, the fact that the young people were so diverse in their backgrounds, expectations and current circumstances I hope enabled me to adjust to them as individuals. Reviewing the literature regularly reminded me that adolescence is a life stage of rapid developmental change, experienced differently by all young people, and that looked-after children are likely to be simultaneously more mature than their peers in some respects but more vulnerable in others by reason of their pre-care experiences. At times, however, my own family circumstances made me particularly uncomfortable researching sensitive areas of young people's lives. It was quite impossible not to respond emotionally to the circumstances of some young people, examples of which are given below in three extracts from field notes made immediately after interviews with young people.

Devora 21/12/2010 (school)

> [Devora] persistent cough/sore throat – had to stop & let her get water as voice was coming & going. Said it had been like that quite a while…fine to talk, inc about death of father. I felt rather uncomfortable – she clearly still has issues of loss, inc best friend who abandoned her after her father died. Seemed to look expectantly at me for response – hard to know what to say [briefly discussed whether friend felt unable to cope with responsibility of supporting D after her bereavement]. Clearly though v fond of & well supported by carer (cousin) & interestingly was doing lots of performing arts which unable to do when F alive – with SS [social services] money (?said not enough time? Did not like to probe further) [in second interview she explained her significant caring responsibilities for her father]. Clearly doing well academically– but always has.

Habib 04/03/2011 (PRU)

> …Small low bldg, uninviting – locked shut. Quite bare but nice artwork inside. [Habib] came straight out as talking to man who answered door. Only member of staff I saw was this man – yngish, scruffy, big, tea cosy hat, quite aggressive to [Habib] when challenged that timetable out of date.
>
> [Habib] small, ynger-looking than age, seemed a bit cowed, but happy to talk. V little idea abt future – even what GCSEs he will take, never mind what college to go to. Felt quite angry when came away – not getting decent ed where he is & wants one.
>
> Clean, cap quite low, baggy trs, just looks a bit pathetic.
>
> Asked when I'd come back – main wishes are v immediate, eg more pocket money. Hasn't met SW after last one left. Has lost count of no of SWs.

Niall 31/03/11 Redhouse PRU

> …Industrial estate is really grim. 1970s nightmare – peeling paint, square concrete & glass buildings, general air of poverty & decay. Pay car park has padlocked gents, no ladies, gloomy warehouse style. Rest has lots of parking warnings –rsvd for businesses – but quite a lot empty. [Redhouse] premises [one of] 15 units, 6 of which currently to let. Security on outside – buzzer entry – but clean & well-kept inside. Upstairs, concrete, grey & maroon. [Redhouse] small – 9 boys 11-19, 'independent school': PRU has –ve associations [Ms Carmine].
>
> But welcoming inside – L shaped area w computers & office cut out of rectangle with glass walls to see yp on 2 sides looking over main resource. Nice bells tinkle on door. I/v in office. [N] just finishing off w Connexions person. Doesn't make eye contact but did speak c ½ hr. Quite a few pauses but some smiles - & when left after speaking to [Ms Carmine] and said thanks & goodbye gave me lovely smile ([Ms Carmine] amazed).

4.6 Data analysis

A grounded theory approach was utilised to derive theoretical concepts from the data. Hammersley's accusation that 'many qualitative researchers overestimate the success of their enterprise, and underestimate the seriousness of its problems' (Hammersley, 2008: page 6) was borne in mind throughout the analytical process. I adopted Mason's advice to consider the literal, interpretive and reflexive meanings of the text (Mason, 2002). By that means I tried to ensure that I considered young people's accounts of their

experiences and explanations for their decisions in the light of data from professionals; my own interactions with them; and the insights available from the longitudinal aspect of the study.

Although I started analysis using NVivo, I eventually decided to resort to manual methods as I became increasingly inclined to agree with Holton (2007) that

> [d]espite the capacity of computer-assisted coding software programs for archiving and ready retrieval of coded data, the largely mechanistic mind-set that results from their application is not only time-consuming but also counter-creative to the conceptual ideation imperative for generating good grounded theory (page 287).

First I colour coded the texts of interview transcripts using different colours for different domains, that is, topics covered by the interview schedule, (eg personal education plans (PEPs) or training), but leaving the ordering intact. Then each line of text was analysed and coded by content in accordance with the initial coding stage of grounded theory. In each interview, codes that appeared on several occasions or that were closely related were grouped together as potential categories and renamed. An example of the coding of a short extract from one of the interviews with a designated teacher from a mainstream school is given at Appendix 4.1, showing the initial *in vivo* codes *extra parent, advocate for that child* and *explain our children to the teachers,* all of which are shown as codes on the left of the page and possible categories on the right. Other codes, such as *not wanting to look different* are shown as codes on the left, and as renamed categories on the right: in the example case, the new title is 'same as the rest'. Memos were written as an explanation and commentary to this process, and an example is given at Appendix 4.2. As more interviews were added to the analysis, the memos were expanded to include comparison of the data from each interviewee, and the initial categories were revised and ordered into a hierarchy that reflected key themes or issues arising from the interviews as a whole.

In order to foreground the perspectives of young people, data from their interviews was prioritised in the eventual selection of categories and the professional participants' data was integrated into these where appropriate. For example, although 'bad behaviour' was a consistent theme of professional interviewees, this material is presented under the categories which emerged from young people's accounts of their lives, such as 'in the care of strangers' and 'being 'looked after'. The devotion of a full chapter to young

people's experiences of 'care and the corporate parent' in a thesis primarily concerned with educational issues reflects the explanations of young people themselves and confirms the interdependence of care and education in the lives of this group of children.

In both the following two chapters, dealing with young people's experiences in care and education respectively, I primarily allow the data to speak for themselves in my account of the findings of the study, again to give precedence to the voices of young people. Discussion of the data through the lenses of the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 3 is reserved for Chapter 7, in which additional data from professional participants addressing policy issues is also presented and analysed.

4.7 Strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the methodology

This is a relatively small study, and findings are presented with acknowledgement that the professionals who participated are not necessarily representative of all post-holders, while looked-after young people are a diverse group, and participants were interviewed during a period of their lives which is one of particularly rapid development and change. Teachers agreeing to take part in a study such as this are likely to be highly motivated by the challenges of the role and particularly reflexive in their professional practice. The inconsistencies in the way in which young people were accessed have been discussed above, and will be considered further in the following chapter.

The study design only included professionals from an education background. Ideally, to obtain a full picture of a young person's progress and support networks, the study would have included perspectives from social workers and from foster carers. This was not possible within the constraints of the project, and there were a number of reasons for the structure that I chose. Firstly, I considered that the key priorities should be the perspectives of young people themselves, and use of a longitudinal design, for the reasons set out above. Educational professionals were included both because of the educational focus of the study and because of the relatively recent introduction of designated teachers and virtual school heads and the limited research on both. Although social workers exercise parental responsibility for looked-after young people on behalf of the local authority, their contribution was of less relevance to this study; there is often a fast turnover of staff which may limit the input they would be able to provide;

and young people often have a difficult relationship with social care staff, which might have affected their willingness to speak with me in the knowledge that their social worker would also be speaking about them.

It would have been helpful to have gathered the views of foster carers: the foster carer who took the opportunity to telephone me to discuss the project further and stressed that foster carers are likely to know young people better than teachers or social workers made a valuable point. However, similar considerations apply as for social workers with regard to the likelihood that this would appear to young people to be quite intrusive, whereas their designated teacher would usually be a senior member of school staff who would know them less well as individuals and be associated with their educational rather than personal lives. Although these issues were borne in mind in analysis, the longitudinal design of the study, and the incorporation of perspectives from education professionals at school or college and local authority level, enabled me to interrogate discrepancies in the data and explore preliminary findings in greater detail over time, thereby enhancing my confidence in the findings presented in the remaining chapters.

Chapter 5:

Care and the Corporate Parent

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the care histories of young people participating in the study, in order to situate consideration of their educational progress within their wider life experiences. Young people's personal experiences are fundamental to understanding their opportunities to develop what Nussbaum identifies as the central human capabilities of 'Emotions' and 'Affiliation' (Nussbaum, 2003) and thereby the relational aspects of the development of autonomy and the exercise of choice. Key themes from the data that are examined in this chapter include the effect of young people's experiences of loss, bereavement and rejection; the way in which corporate parenting is experienced by young people; the negotiation of multiple transitions as they age out of care; the effect of their experiences on some of the most important relationships in their lives; and the interdependence of young people's care histories and educational experiences. As noted above in Chapter 4, it should be borne in mind that neither social workers nor carers were interviewed for this study, therefore the reported findings are limited by drawing only on the perspectives of young people and educational professionals.

5.2 Young people's personal and care histories

The diverse ethnic backgrounds and needs of the young people participating in the study are summarised in Chapter 4 (see Table 4.1). The majority of the group was looked after by reason of maltreatment or family dysfunction (although in many cases I remained unaware of the precise nature of the circumstances in which they came into care). Three were or had been UASC, one (Riley) was remanded into care, one (Devora) was a British orphan and Ollie was in care by reason of his significant physical and mental disabilities. The circumstances of many were complex: for example, Habib entered the country with his family as an asylum-seeker, but was in care because his parents suffered mental health problems and were unable to care for him, and he had also been diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).

5.2.1 ***Pre-care experiences***

The 21 young people in the study came into state care between the ages of four and fifteen. Twelve did not enter care until after they reached secondary school age. Only a few had experienced stable and consistent care from a young age. These included Michael, who had Asperger's Syndrome and had been with his foster carers since the age of four: they would have adopted him but for the loss of support from the local authority consequent upon a transfer of parental responsibility. Ollie had been cared for in a residential home for disabled children for most of his life and he would continue to be dependent into adulthood. Devora, an only child, had been a young carer, and her life, although stable, had been greatly circumscribed. She described life with her father:

> he was so over-protective of me that I couldn't even go to sleepovers…or parties he wouldn't let me go to…Yeah, my social life, I have one now...I had to do all the housework and look after him, and that's not a childhood…I've always…had responsibility with the house…I think I started doing the housework…like five or six years old.

Most of the young people had experienced significant disruption and/or loss in their lives before entering into care. Many had missed substantial periods of education and/or experienced several changes of school, but the reasons for this were varied. Habib entered care in 2005, when he was nine or ten, and described an unsettled home life:

> My dad…yeah he never taught me, I didn't really know how to speak properly…I went to school, but I was like…in, out, in, and then I changed school…then that became like a habit really...I kept moving houses…I never stayed in one place, I never stayed in one school.…Probably twelve…I can remember a lot of schools I went to, I can remember lots.

Adam, too, moved around a lot when living with his mother:

> probably about seven different houses... I've been all around London, I know every part….Not getting taken to school, stuff like that, and I probably… started school properly in Year 6….

He described the effect on his education:

> I was what is all this? I couldn't even say ABC…And I knew nothing in Year 6 because the teachers was teaching all the other people, they knew what they was

> doing, I didn't have a clue. I was just sitting there … I couldn't do one plus one, I couldn't write my name.

Both Qadira and Unity attended primary school regularly but appear to have encountered difficulties adjusting to secondary school. Qadira stated: 'I went primary school, it was alright, and then when I left primary school, went secondary, that's when everything started', whilst Unity, who entered care at eleven, explained 'last time I was like permanent in school properly was primary school, Year 6…and when it was secondary it went pear-shaped, my life went off the rails'. Qadira explained that her mother came from a country in which it was customary for girls to marry young 'so obviously she didn't really go to school'. Qadira said she found secondary school 'boring', and was excluded for assaulting a teacher. By the time she entered care at twelve or thirteen she was registered at a Pupil Referral Unit, and appeared to have an entrenched aversion to school:

> Schools haven't really been my thing, like. Can't explain it, but … I just don't like sitting in the classroom and listening to people telling me what to do. I don't like that.

Sofia, Bashir and Farouk had entered the UK from Angola, Afghanistan and Somalia respectively. Sofia had learnt English at school and experienced regular school attendance in her home country, while Farouk had had a limited home education before coming to England. Bashir explained 'I didn't really go to school much there, and I think it's very different from here to there, the education is not very good there'. Both boys knew 'a bit of English' on arrival (Bashir), but not much. For Bashir and Farouk in particular, coming to England provided opportunities not previously available to them. In common with many asylum-seeking young people (Jackson, et al., 2005; Jackson and Cameron, 2012), Bashir, in particular, was determined to make the most of his education.

There was therefore a wide disparity within the cohort in terms of the extent to which young people were able and willing to engage in formal education, which could be directly linked to their pre-care experiences and was reflected in their aspirations and educational trajectories as they approached adulthood, an issue discussed in Chapter 6.

5.2.2 *Loss, bereavement and rejection*

The three asylum-seeking young people had had to come to terms with multiple losses, of their wider community and way of life, as well as their family and friends. Sofia chose not to talk about her experiences in her home country. Bashir and Farouk described highly traumatic experiences. Farouk remembered travelling with a woman who brought him, his brother and sister to the UK:

> I didn't know her, she came with us here and then she left us…at a chicken shop, and she said she would be back, and she never came back. Went outside, and we was lost, we didn't know what to do…So we were speaking to people, and we found someone who speak our language, and then she took us to her home, and we stayed with her for a little bit, then she called the social worker and all that, foster care, and that's how we got into it.

Bashir had no way of knowing what had happened to his immediate family:

> My brothers and sisters are…I don't know where they are, because if you know a strange thing happened to me, I lost my father…my granddad's sent me and my cousin to this country just for protection, but…father I don't know where he is, this five years I don't know where my mother is...and when I came to this country I treated my foster carers like my new parents, because I knew I'd lost them, there wouldn't be any way back to find them.

When asked what, if anything, she would change in her life, Sofia said simply: 'I just need my mum and my family, that's all.'

Loss, bereavement and rejection were, however, also key themes of the personal circumstances of the cohort as a whole. Ollie's father died between the interviews in Year 11 and Year 12, Riley had lost his best friend in a house fire, and one of Habib's carers died during the course of the study, triggering difficulties in his relationship with the remaining carer. Tasmin's father had died when she was seven or eight, following which her mother's drug use had worsened. Tasmin had taken on much of the care of her brother, who was then a baby or toddler and she described finding it 'really hard to let go' of that parenting role when they were taken into care, albeit together. Priya entered care at the age of thirteen, when she was pregnant, but had not been able to keep the baby, who it appeared had been removed from her care. Devora had lost her mother when she was one and her father when she was thirteen. She recounted telling her father the night before he died that they really could not cope alone any longer, but

needed to seek professional help. For Devora, her status as an orphan seemed to be far more significant than her care status:

> *are there any other looked-after children in the school?...*
> I don't have a clue… I know there's quite a few of us that have lost parents, a parent…I can go to them if I feel low, and if I just need someone to talk to that knows what it feels like.

Not long after her father had died, Devora's best friend had started to ignore her and she felt quite alone: 'I have friends. Yeah…Not as close as I want it to be though. I don't know if that's because of my circumstances'.

The principal sense of loss concerned young people's relationships with their birth families, both leading up to and after their entry into care. These relationships were a preoccupation for all except Michael, albeit for very different reasons. At least two of the young people gave accounts suggesting that they blamed themselves for their removal from their families. Habib seemed reluctant to attribute culpability to his birth parents for their neglect:

> I can remember quite a bit, it was kind of my fault that I was in care, because a social worker came knocking on the door and there was no-one in the house, there was me and my younger siblings, and I opened the door, and she goes are your family home?….and then after that they got on my case….it's just that's something in my memory that sticks out…That was when I was like six.

Luis and his sister were together in his placement, but his brother had remained with his mother. Luis was unsure why he was in care, but thought it was because 'I didn't want to share my sweets with my sister and I assaulted her basically'. He saw his parents every half term, but needed translators as neither spoke English and Luis did not speak their languages.

5.2.2.1 Loss and sibling relationships

Maintaining relationships with their siblings was particularly complicated for some of the young people, many of whom came from large and/or separated families: Qadira, for example, was one of seven children; Adam had three sisters, one in foster care with him, one living independently and one in foster care in his home borough; Bashir had no siblings in the UK and had lost contact with his brother and sister in Afghanistan, but had a cousin three years younger in foster care with him; Imogen had an older sister

at university and a younger one with Down's syndrome, who had been adopted: she had contact with the younger one, but her mother did not. Callum had a brother and sister living with his father a considerable distance away, and lived with his younger sister until some time in Year 12:

> I used to see her every day and now I don't see her at all….she got moved to a care home because of her behaviour, drugs all this stuff, then I think she was causing trouble in that care home…she got moved to…some place really far out of London….Haven't seen her for months, long, long time…don't think now we are not even allowed to call her, only certain times, she's not allowed to have a phone.

Tasmin's sister was not in care, because they had different mothers. At the time that she was taken into care, her sister wanted Tasmin and her brother to live with her, but she was thought too young,

> even though she had her own child and my foster carer was the same age as her...And then they wouldn't let us see her because one of my foster carers knew her, and said we weren't allowed to see her, because she knows what she's like, apparently…And she didn't even hardly know my sister.
>
> *So how did that change?*
> Well, like my new foster carer was talking about contact and who I wanted contact with, and I told her, spoke to her about my sister, and she was like no, that's not right, and then organised it with my social worker.

By Year 12 however, Tasmin, although she had threatened to move in with her sister because her brother's behaviour in the placement was so poor, acknowledged that she would rather stay with her carer because her sister had depression and was 'not very stable'.

Jacinda and Habib had particularly changeable relationships with siblings. In Year 11, Jacinda had a brother of twelve who had lived in foster care with her before being taken out to live with his father when she was seven; a brother of about six in a different foster placement; and she had just made contact with a brother a little older than herself who had been adopted before she was born, and had found her through Facebook. By the Year 12 interview, the middle brother had been removed to foster care; the youngest one had changed foster carer and she had still not met her older brother. In

Year 13 she had met the elder brother at last and her youngest brother was back with Jacinda's mother.

Habib had an older brother and sister and a younger brother and sister. They had originally all been placed together except for the older sister, but split when the older brother wanted to move and Habib left with him. At that stage he was 'really attached' to his elder brother, but 'wasn't really attached' to the younger siblings, who since moved to live with his elder sister. Later, when the older brother wanted to move again, Habib had stayed in his placement, now alone. By Year 13, his relationship with his older brother had become more problematic: his brother was dropping out of college and back in again and Habib was trying to persuade him to attend ('I tell him. I tell him to go'). With hindsight it appeared that Habib thought his brother's behaviour might have had much to do with his own ('I might of got influenced'). By Year 13 he thought the most important people in his life were his younger brother and sister, by then thirteen and fifteen or sixteen and said 'they are important to me, I love them to death, yeah'. He arranged contact himself now he was over eighteen, but was only able to see them about every half-term.

Kayla, too, came from a large and dispersed family. When we first met, she no longer saw her mother and had little knowledge of her six siblings. Two had never entered care, she and two of her brothers had originally shared a placement, and another brother had gone to a residential children's home. Only her youngest brother was in the same foster care family as Kayla, as her older brother had moved out at sixteen. She would not see him until her younger brother felt able to, because 'the way he moved out, it was kind of aggressive, and it was scary towards him, so he was like no I'm not going to see him until I'm ready'. One brother was in America, one she thought was in the UK but had suffered an accident, and she only saw her sister twice a year because she was 'not reliable'. By Year 13, Kayla's younger brother wanted to see one with whom they had shared a placement, but the older one had just come out of prison, and was not prepared to arrange contact through social services, who would not allow the younger brother contact without their oversight. Kayla had met him once, but 'it was kind of weird because I didn't know what to say…like starting off again'.

5.2.2.2 Parental rejection

A sense of rejection continued to impact most of the young people many years after their entry into care. Adam had decided not to pursue the relationship with his birth family:

> I don't think they are really bothered, because there's been several times they could have arranged to meet me at a secure place… and they've just left it for about five years, six years… every time she [the social worker] comes she says "I've tried speaking to your mum, but she won't answer the phone". Basically …she ain't willing to work with her birth kids…
>
> *So you haven't seen them for a while?*
> No, I don't need to too, I don't think I want to...I don't want to see any of them no more.

Habib had not seen his family for about eight years and was more forceful in expressing his feelings:

> I feel pissed off because they were meant to come to contact innit… My dad, I don't know him, I don't care. My older brothers, I don't care, I don't like them, I don't associate myself with them. There's been enough times, yeah, they were meant to come to contact, and it's not a thing where they couldn't come…They were just too lazy. So why should I give a fuck with them if they don't give a fuck with me. Sorry.

Jacinda said simply that her mother 'stopped talking to me, which is quite bad'. Her mother had lied about her whereabouts, had moved, and social services had been unable to find her; she had also stopped communicating with Jacinda through Facebook. Jacinda described her mother as 'a bit dodgy' in Year 11, saying 'I couldn't really trust her, because she lies a lot, so I don't really know the truth from her any more'.

Priya and Qadira both saw their mothers every day, although the relationships appeared abrasive, Qadira, saying 'she's like "if you would have listened to me you wouldn't be here right now, you would be living with your mum, and have a good job, and money". I'm like "oh my God"'.

Gilroy was insistent in Year 11 that he attended the secondary school at which we met because his father was Catholic and he was Catholic and his father had wanted him to attend a Catholic school, but he had not in fact seen his father for four years at that

time: 'whenever we plan a meeting to go and see my dad he's never in, he's always gone away or he's out'. When asked 'if you could do anything at all with your life, what would it be?' he replied 'see my family more maybe'. In Year 12, it appeared nothing had changed, but Gilroy asked not to talk about it.

Elliott saw a lot of his family, saying: 'obviously I would like to go back to live with my mum, my granddad or something, with my family, but…I'm in care, it's alright really'. His mother was invited to relevant meetings – 'she comes sometimes, but sometimes she doesn't come'. Ollie's three sisters still lived at home with his mother and he too would have liked to go home, but thought 'she won't let me live with her because she thinks I will hit her, but I won't hit her'. The fact that he had seen so little of his father before his death also caused him distress.

5.2.2.3 Taking responsibility

Riley, in contrast, wished he had entered care much earlier and in particular before he became engaged in criminal activity. He had set fire to his mother's house at the age of fifteen and been remanded into care after his family 'washed their hands' of him. Riley rated his birth family as probably the most important people in his life and had invested a lot of effort in repairing the relationship with his mother, including making a two-hour train journey each weekend to visit. However, he presented as remarkably self-contained and managed the relationship with his family carefully: 'Never really tell them much…They just know what they need to know'.

This sense of taking responsibility for managing birth family relationships was common among participants. Bashir ensured he kept in contact with his family ('what I've got left of') and that he called his grandfather in Pakistan from his uncle's house 'because he worries about us obviously'. Callum expressed guilt at having neglected his birth family while setting up his new flat in Year 13:

> I've just really been focusing on myself at the moment, just to get stuff sorted out for the flat and looking after myself, but this week I'm going to see quite a lot of the family …I ain't seen my mum in about two months. I feel bad for that. Christmas as well, I haven't seen her, feel really bad.

Like Riley, Kayla managed family relationships with responsibility and care. She saw her sister 'quite frequently' but explained in Year 13:

> I haven't seen her this month. I did it on purpose because … since I … was eighteen, I've seen her so much. And it's like I have other people to see as well, and she can't just depend on me to just see her. So I just like make sure that she knows I'm here…I can come see her occasionally, not every week… I really go to see my sister, to see my nieces, that's important.

When asked whether she saw the importance of these relationships as primarily for her benefit or that of her family, Kayla replied:

> It's more important for me to know that I have that link with them, but they also feel an importance that I have the link with them, because they think I'm a positive role model, which I can say I think I am, for my nieces anyway.

5.2.2.4 Restoring family connections

For some young people, attaining eighteen enabled them to re-forge relationships with members of their birth family they had previously been prohibited from seeing. This opportunity can either provide a 'turning point' (Masten et al., 2004) in young people's lives or become a significant distraction from other issues, such as their education. Niall's mother, according to his social worker in Year 11, had 'completely abandoned him it seems'. Towards the end of the project, Niall had got back in touch with his mother – but his social worker considered he was 'finding that hard to process': he was by then unemployed, friendless apart from his dog, and 'gang-affiliated'.

Devora was intending to seek papers from the court to trace her maternal grandparents, of whose existence she had been unaware until her cousin had found some papers. She explained that on her mother's death, her grandparents had wanted to be involved in her life but her father had cut them out completely, going so far as to tell Devora that her mother had been an orphan: 'I don't know any of my mum's side…I mean I don't even know what my mum looked like.'

When asked what her priorities were at that time in Year 13, Kayla replied 'right now, I'm getting to know the rest of my family'. Having previously chosen not to see her mother, she had been back in contact and visited her for her birthday, but the relationship was not that of parent to child: 'she's just like a friend to me now, she's always got young girls at [the] house who are my age, I don't mind, I just chill with the girls…I'm used to it now.' She also attempted to meet up with her father, whom she

had not seen since she was six, but he failed to turn up for two arranged meetings and she said

> I'm still talking to him on the phone and stuff, but I don't know, I'm not really bothered with him anymore….First time it was … something to do with a job, second time he was running late …he was supposed to come at two thirty, we waited until seven thirty and he still didn't come… And he said he wanted to see me…

5.2.3 ***In the care of strangers***

5.2.3.1 Placement [in]stability

Unfortunately, but not unusually, for many of the group, experiences of loss in their family histories were compounded by multiple placements in care. Table 5.1 shows the number of placements experienced by participants and the last known placement, highlighting especially the changes likely over the period of the study.

Young people were eloquent about the reality of living as a stranger in other people's family unit. Some failed to settle in care at all and deliberately disrupted their placements. Unity said of her placements:

> Obviously they are strangers. They just dump you there, 'there you go, there's your new placement', you don't know no-one, you are in the middle of nowhere, and it's a bit daunting'.

Table 5.1: young people's placement histories

Name	Entry into care	No. of known placements	Last known placement	
			Since	Type
Adam	Year 5	3	Year 6	Foster care (awaiting independent)
Bashir	Year 8	2	Year 8	Foster carer (intending independent at end of school)
Callum	Summer after Year 7	3	Year 13	Independent
Devora	Year 9	1	Year 9	Kinship care (awaiting independent)
Elliott	Summer after Year 6	1	Year 11	Foster care
Farouk	Year 7	4	Year 13	Independent (with elder brother)
Gilroy	End Year 7	4	Year 13	Custody
Habib	Year 5	5	Year 13	Supported (awaiting independent)
Imogen	Year 4	'loads'	Year 13	Semi-independent (awaiting independent)
Jacinda	End Year 1	At least 4	End Year 4	Foster care (until finishes uni.)
Kayla	Year 1	2	End Year 4	Foster care (until end 1st year uni.)
Luis	Year 2	2	Year 9	Foster care (prob. stay post-18)
Michael	Age 4	1	Age 4	Foster care (will stay post-18)
Niall	Year 8	About 5	Year 13	Semi-independent (didn't attend housing panel)
Ollie	?	1 or 2?	? since age 9	Residential care home (ends at 18)
Priya	Age 13 (Year 8/9)	About 6	Age 16	Supported (ends at 18)
Qadira	Age 12 or 13, (Year 7/8)	4	Age 16	Supported (awaiting independent)
Riley	Age 15 (Year 10/11)	3	Age 16	Supported lodgings (awaiting independent)
Sofia	Age 16	2	Age 18	Independent
Tasmin	Age 8 (Year 3/4)	4	Year 9	Foster care
Unity	Age 11 (Year 6/7)	About 10	Age 16	Supported (ends at 18)

Similarly, Priya declared 'I don't like living with strangers', attributing her unhappiness in foster care to this fact. She deliberately sabotaged a foster placement: 'I told them that I wanted to move, and social service don't listen, and I got a problem, so I gave trouble so I could move from the house'. Qadira also demonstrated self-reliance (Cameron, 2007) in 'managing' her placements. She had liked one of her foster placements until a new girl came, with whom she 'didn't get on'; she said 'we had a fight, and then I just took my stuff and moved'. Having entered care because she was beyond her mother's control at the age of twelve or thirteen, Qadira explained:

> I wanted my freedom, I wanted people to not give me orders, tell me what to do, like my mum was doing, and forcing me to go to school, and telling me what to do and what time to come in...I just wanted my own independence, but when I was in foster care it was even worse.

Others described a pattern of short-term carers, failure to get on with foster families and differential treatment from the birth children of foster parents. Luis thought he had changed carers because the first carer was not providing an adequate standard of care. Kayla reported that in one of her placements 'we just didn't want to be there, so we all played up'. Imogen described 'loads' of carers from the age of eight to nine before remaining in a placement from age nine to seventeen, but this placement was stable rather than happy. Gilroy's placement had also seemed stable in Year 11, but he had moved to semi-independent accommodation when we met in Year 12, saying only 'I moved from there…Didn't like it…Got bored with it'. Riley had no notice of a move from one care home to another: 'they literally turned up and said right, you're moving, pack up your stuff'.

Jacinda experienced a number of short placements between the ages of six and eight, before she settled into a permanent placement. Sadly, although she was very happy in the first placement, it was short-term and she was required to move to another:

> I just didn't fit in, I didn't like it. I guess because I really liked the family that I first moved in, I liked the parents of that family, and then I got moved to another family and I just didn't want to be there, so I was a bit of an annoying child.

So Jacinda was moved to another short-term family before finding a long-term placement. But in one of the short-term placements she said

> the parents' daughter…used to like hit me and my little brother, like kick us around…And she used to make us sit up and watch scary movies… I watched Scream when I was only six.

As a result, in her final - very successful - placement Jacinda was unable to sleep on her own for some time and slept with the light on until she was about nine[10].

Tasmin also attributed her behavioural shortcomings to her experiences in foster care. She was cared for by four families from the age of eight to sixteen. The first was short-term; the second lasted four years but ended because the carers had 'family issues'; she was very unhappy in the third, and explained 'I was really badly behaved in Year 8…I was with one that I didn't really like, so I was always angry'. Her pleas to be moved were ignored until the carer became pregnant; and she had been with her current carer, with whom she had an excellent relationship, for two years when we first met.

Young people's accounts were echoed by designated teachers such as Ms Tan, who said of a young man in Year 11:

> he's been with us three years…he's had foster placements that have broken down, he's had care homes that have broken down…[he] has brought himself up since he was two years old, [he] has been the responsible adult in [his] life since he was two years old. You aren't going to get a well-adjusted young person in that set of circumstances.

Unity found it 'stressful' living with carers: 'they used to give me orders telling me I can't do this, I have to do this, I have to do that…Like what time I had to be in. They used to ring police, report me missing'. Unity was angry to have been moved out of her home area, to keep her away from influences thought to be harmful to her. She was one of the three young people in the study who had experienced residential care (the others being Priya and Riley, excluding Ollie, who was in a home for disabled children). Of these three, Unity thought she had been in about ten placements, consistently running away (as a result of which she experienced four periods of secure accommodation) until she eventually settled in the last, which was back in her home area, and in which she

[10] Evidence as to the prevalence of maltreatment in foster care and in kinship care is limited, particularly in the UK, and research faces difficulties in distinguishing between maltreatment and poor care by foster carers under stress, as well as ascertaining whether the allegations are well-founded (Biehal, 2014).

remained for a year and three to four months. She moved from there because she could not stay beyond sixteen and the local authority placed her in semi-independent accommodation. This is common practice for young people over sixteen, which results in another move to council accommodation at the age of eighteen. Although acknowledging the potential difficulties and differences of opinion in this area, the House of Commons Education Committee has recently recommended that 'Staying Put' should be extended to young people in residential homes to the age of 21 (House of Commons Education Committee, 2014).

Priya was placed in four care homes for a few months each and claimed that she was assaulted in them. Eventually, she said, 'my social worker knows I don't like living with strangers, so she pushed her manager so I could get my own flat, some independence' and Priya moved to a supported living arrangement through a local charitable organisation when she was sixteen.

Riley was more forthcoming about his experience of residential care. He had attended two homes and the contrast was dramatic. In the first, he said:

> I spent more time with the police and in hospital, they just weren't looking after us properly...They just done their own thing and left us to it, they weren't keeping an eye on us, they weren't helping us cook, they was just letting us be, run around like idiots should I say – which we were.

The second was 'a lot better. It was bigger, staff just made you feel like it was your home, they looked after you, they done things with you, they talked with you. Helped me when I needed it'. At sixteen, the residential home was no longer available and Riley moved again, this time to supported lodgings with a couple who were police officers, which had worked well for him. He still kept in touch with the residential home, to visit – and informally mentor – a young man a little younger than himself, although all the staff there when he had attended had moved on.

Ms Coral (Riley's designated teacher) reinforced Riley's appraisal of the residential homes:

> we had some from a private care home, and some from the local authority care home…I have to say the professionals in the private care home were a lot better, a lot more highly trained, a lot more committed to the child than the local authority one, which was diabolical, I mean it was just terrible.

She added:

> if a child from one of the local authority care homes had been in a big, mainstream comprehensive, they could have easily been lost, I think, without the teacher actually taking notice of their status, and keeping a close eye on how they were progressing. You wouldn't have got anyone in for parents' evening, or, you know, progress days, or things like that.

Ms Tan appeared to have had uniformly negative encounters with residential care homes:

> usually if they are in residential homes they don't tend to attend school… I just think there is a huge chasm between being in a foster placement and being in a residential home. Because really people are paid to care for you, and it's quite a disjointed and vacant emotional space for young people who are damaged.
>
> …they don't have the ability to put in boundaries and to really make it a place where children feel cared for and safe…and you have to have a particularly dedicated and passionate kind of person to work with children like that, because it is relentless.

Stonycross employed an advisory teacher in the virtual school whose remit was to focus on children in residential homes 'and try to get them back into some form of education' (Ms Mason), as did the local authority in which Ms Tan's school was situated.

In general local authorities endeavoured to avoid placement changes during Key Stage 4, in accordance with guidance (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010b). However the extent to which representation from the virtual school was included in placement decisions varied. Virtual heads considered that they were not always consulted appropriately. In Ironbridge, young people were often brought back into the local authority from therapeutic out-of-borough placements at sixteen, a process in which Mr Steel had 'no consultation…whatsoever'. Ms Mason recounted a young person being moved from a residential home into another area a few weeks before their GCSEs, and taking no exams at all as a result, although they had been predicted to do 'really well':

> it was a response to a kind of a crisis, but it wasn't the sort of crisis that couldn't have waited a little bit longer…we were not part of the decisions, it's all part of this thing where different teams are making different decisions.

Such examples highlight the importance of the virtual head holding a position of seniority within the local authority and wielding influence in both social care and education, to ensure that decisions take into account all aspects of a young person's life.

Ms Mason had experienced children being moved into semi-independent accommodation at fifteen, a practice she described as 'madness' ('as a parent, your child coming up for their GCSEs, would you want them to go off and live somewhere on their own, with no support or guidance…?'). Ms Oak at Forest Hill College was concerned about a young woman whose behaviour had deteriorated to the extent that she was facing exclusion, seemingly triggered by a move from foster care into hostel or semi-independent accommodation: 'the type of young person she is, the other young people that will be in there, I don't think she will do well in that environment, but…we are one voice around a table of many'. Mr Brook acknowledged that resource implications played a part, explaining:

> sometimes… a placement will change from foster care to semi-independent because it's felt that the young person is ready for that. Sometimes…the young person is just not making use of the foster placement, and it's felt that really there is no point in putting the resources where that foster carer could be…working with another young person, just bed blocking almost.

5.2.3.2 Relationships with carers

Only a few fortunate girls (Jacinda, Kayla and Tasmin) appeared to have the kind of relationship with their (current) carers that could be regarded as being as close and supportive as one would expect from birth parents, but these relationships were invaluable. Tasmin, for example, was able to state, in answer to the question 'if you've got problems with schoolwork, where do you go?': 'to my foster carer, I go to her about everything to be honest'. Tasmin had only been with her carer since Year 9, but had settled very well, saying 'I want to go maybe to university, and she was like "I'm always here for you", so that's good'. However, this placement was under pressure from her brother's behaviour. Her carer was an experienced foster carer, who was originally intended to provide a short-term placement, but she had agreed to keep Tasmin and her brother in the longer term. Tasmin thought her carer was not getting adequate support with his behaviour, particularly since his counselling sessions had been stopped by the local authority: 'She finds it really hard…his behaviour's really bad. He's like a bull'. Consequently, in Year 12 Tasmin was considering going to live with her sister.

Jacinda's relationship with her carers was such that she genuinely felt part of their family: 'I've been with my family for so long I just don't feel I'm in care now'. When asked who she thought were the most important people in her life, she unhesitatingly replied 'family, my mum, I call her mum'. One of the daughters of the family was a year younger than her, 'so we have sort of like a bond'. Her choice of university was influenced by the fact that her 'big sister', 'mum' and 'cousin' (all members of her foster family) all went to the same one. While she attributed this strong relationship to the length of time she had been with the family, it was also clear that they treated her as they did their own children. In Year 12 (field notes) she said she thought she was 'one of the lucky ones in care' because her family is 'so lovely', giving as an example the fact that they took her on holiday with them to Thailand soon after she came to live with them. Social services had paid 'a bit', but by no means all. She also confided outside the formal interview that she thought she might genuinely be related to her foster family and it was clear that this was something that she would very much like to be the case. Perhaps most importantly, Jacinda knew she had a family for life: 'they always say that I'm part of the family, they say if I do want to leave I can but they'll still be there if I want to come back, that's what they all say'.

Similar promises had been given to Adam, Tasmin and Kayla. Adam said he wasn't 'really bothered' about his birth parents' rejection 'because 'basically they [his foster family] are my family now' in Year 11, adding 'my carer said because she's so nice I can stay with her until I want'. However, by Year 13 he was preparing to move out, as explained further at 5.4.1 below.

Kayla reported that although the leaving care team said she would have to leave care at eighteen,

> my carer said I can stay until they think I'm ready, I think I'm ready to move out, they are not going to get rid of me…if I wanted to come back, I can always come back…Yeah, I was happy when they said that.

Promise of an ongoing relationship was especially important to Kayla, whose early history had resulted in her finding it difficult to make personal relationships with her peers and particularly with boys. She felt that her foster father and brother had been extremely instrumental in enabling her to overcome those difficulties, adding 'I think it will get better as I grow older, and I'm still in contact with my carers. If I'm not I

think…I'll retrack a bit and just go back how I was'. For Kayla, this placement, where, she said, 'we are loved', was the best thing about her experience of care:

> I think just being with them has made me settle down, and I know that my family is there for me…I guess it depends on how you act and treat people…we had respect… we had one carer before, but I don't think he really liked me… they were going to all these nice countries, and we were left, so we went to respite with our carers that we live with now. And then they took us. It's really disturbing. We weren't allowed in the living room…because their sofas were white…. we just didn't want to be there, so we all played up…. We couldn't handle it…we were treated completely differently.

Jacinda, Kayla (sometimes) and Michael were the only participants to refer to their foster carers as their 'parents', but even very stable placements such as Michael's tended to have a fragile quality. In Michael's case, he expressed significant anxiety over 'taking the strain' off his parents:

> Like if there's any way that … I could help, I do it …They've had us since we were four and six, it's about time we started…helping them…because if they get upset about stuff we've done I just don't like seeing them upset….
>
> *Can you give me a recent example of that?*
> …because me and my sister aren't quite as…straight-thinking as normal, so we might put washing on the pile that are still wet, and not yet dry, by accident. We might get told off for it.

Only two of the young people experienced kinship care, Devora, who named her cousin as the most important person in her life ('without her I'd probably be in the care system, God knows where, loads of foster carers or in a home') and Callum, who lived briefly with his aunt and uncle. Callum was much happier there than in his previous placement, and felt he had made significant progress:

> ever since I moved in with my auntie I've done well at school. I moved in when I was in Year 11…I was still bunking some lessons, but…I coped much better in school…I'm more mature than I ever have been ever since living with my auntie and uncle. They've helped me a lot…they've changed me…mainly manners, acting like I'm a seventeen year old, you know, not acting like an idiot…They are very strict when it comes to manners...

However, this placement had broken down by the time we met in Year 13 and he was living independently.

Imogen only confided in Year 13 that she had not had a good relationship with her foster mother since she was ten or eleven, although she had 'got along' with the rest of the family, which in part explained why she had stayed. Her sister had been with her in the placement until she reached eighteen, but she had 'not really' been happy there either. Matters came to a head in Year 12, when the carer locked her out (seemingly not for the first time) and told her she did not want her to stay there any longer. Imogen ran to her mother's where she stayed until semi-independent accommodation was found for her. She said she loved living on her own, because 'I don't have people saying [Imogen] can you do this, [Imogen] can you do that'. When asked whether there were any changes she would like to see in the care system, Imogen replied 'I think they should like really look into who they pick as carers'. She was unable to think of any good thing about being in care at all, although she acknowledged that she thought her future prospects were better as a result of the educational support she had received.

In Habib's case, realisation that he was treated differently from his carers' birth children dawned gradually as he grew up. In Year 11, Habib described himself as 'happy' in his placement, but by Year 12, he had decided to leave at eighteen: 'I kind of want to have my own house, like no one telling me what to do. Nothing bad, just can't wait'. In Year 13, however, he felt rejected by his carers, although he struggled to articulate why. One had died of cancer in the intervening year and it may be that the strong sense of 'family' at such a time and the family's priorities had served to make Habib feel excluded from family membership. He said:

> towards the last years everything kind of, I don't know why…I started thinking too much....Like started noticing things…about the family and stuff…this stuff was not right, kind of like it was kind of bitchy. So I didn't like it at all, I didn't stand for it. I never told them this because…end up with me just going crazy… Pissed me off, so that's why I didn't get on with them.
>
> *Were there any particular incidents that you thought weren't right?*
> Favouritism, I mean like telling me I can't have a phone, can't have a BB [blackberry], when their eight year old son, the next day, gets a BB, in front of my face. Telling me that I can't go on the internet, and their eight year old son goes on the internet every single day. And she asked for … my friend's mum's number, and to only go to his mum and bitch about me, telling his mum, laughing badly at me, and my friend's mum has to stick up for me.

Habib stressed that his carers had been 'very supportive' when he was excluded from school and did not go into details about what caused the final breakdown in the relationship but clearly felt rejected:

> I was with them for like five years or something and over a little thing like this… they've decided to let me go and they've never like even texted me back, so…I have their number…but I ain't gonna really do eff…for people who don't care about me so…don't really care to be honest.

Kayla and Qadira both resented being shouted at by carers, with Qadira saying:

> they didn't really know how to talk to me. They used to raise their voice and stuff, and that don't work with me, that seriously don't work. You've got to know how to talk to me to get my attention, like to be like a proper, talk properly in a conversation….they treated me like I was a little kid, probably my age was small, but inside my brain I wasn't small.

Even where relationships were good, participating young people – like many adolescents – might not feel able to confide in their carers. Luis described a good relationship with his carers, who were the second family he had lived with, and with whom he had lived since about Year 9, shortly before he was excluded from mainstream school. When asked if he felt that either of his carers could have supported him differently, he said 'I'm not sure actually, I didn't tell them lots of stuff'.

5.2.4 ***The interdependence of care and education***

There were two key consequences of the kind of personal difficulties described above. The first related to the effect of placement disruption on educational continuity and the second to young people's ability to engage in education. This section provides an account of young people's educational histories in care, including educational disruption, difficulties in adjusting to education on entry into care and the effect of their prior – and in some cases ongoing - experiences on behaviour and focus in school.

5.2.4.1 Educational disruption

Notwithstanding the established association between placement disruption and educational difficulties (O'Sullivan et al., 2013), the shortage of appropriately skilled foster carers (Sinclair et al., 2007; Norgate, 2012) continues to affect young people's placement stability and impact on educational stability. This did not appear to have been

problematic for Imogen, Jacinda or Kayla, whose changes of school were all confined to the primary stage, but young people experiencing a number of changes of secondary school reported more difficulties. Although Habib was clear that his educational opportunities had been improved by entry into care, he had had a far from ideal experience:

> This is my fourth one [foster carer] ….Yeah. I never stayed in the same school… like the first one I stayed in one school, second one I went two schools, third one I went one school, this one I went to one school, so I've been quite a few.

Riley entered care via remand at the age of fifteen and missed most of Year 10 through a combination of pre-care and in-care difficulties:

> I moved to [the first residential home], they didn't put me in any school, I was there for a month, then I got moved to [the second residential home], I was still out of school for quite a while, I lasted three hours over two days in one school, and then I got moved to the [Pupil Referral Unit].
>
> *Did you deliberately try to get out of that school or how did it happen?*
> No, I just didn't cope, I had a fight, almost had a fight with a teacher…We got arguing and he threatened me, and that's it, I just kicked off…It was just the way I was.

For Unity, school moves arose directly from her inability to settle in placements:

> I left school quite young. I went to a number of different schools, but never really attended…I got moved in different boroughs...I lived in about ten different placements…I always ran away…Obviously when I run away from placement and then they'd move me and it was all big confusion…
>
> *I can imagine. How long did you manage to stay in a school?*
> Not long, only a few months at a time, but I never really attended…. wasn't happy where I was, so was rebelling, didn't want to go to school….I went to two different secondary schools that were proper secondary schools, and I went to a few like PR [Pupil Referral] units, went to three different…four different ones, done a bit of home schooling.

While many of the young people had behavioural difficulties prior to entering care, for some, including Niall and Callum, the distress associated with the events leading to their entry into care manifested in disruption at school on entering care. Five of the twelve boys had been excluded from school or college (Gilroy, Habib, Luis, Niall and Riley). Some young people were more articulate than others in describing the challenges they

faced in adjusting to school, but it is important to consider briefly young people's accounts of their difficulties in conforming in school and engaging in their education. Callum explained:

> before I went into care I was in Year 7, and the whole year I was great, I was brilliant, no bunking, nothing, I was amazing that whole year...I was down when I went into care…from Year 8 to Year 10 I was non-stop bunking, swearing at the teachers, doing bad stuff.
>
> *What made you bunk?*
> I suppose I couldn't be arsed with the lessons, I was never in the mood for it.

Although Callum had made considerable progress since entering care ('I did calm down a lot in Year 11'), and was clearly trying hard to stay calm and focused, it was apparent that his personal history continued to impact on his educational career. He had missed a lot of school since entering care and was facing criminal charges for an offence of violence when we first met in Year 11, an incident for which he narrowly avoided exclusion through the good offices of his designated teacher.

Many of the young people referred to similar difficulties in behaving conformably in school, and in particular keeping their temper. Gilroy considered that it was helpful for staff to know his care status 'in case people say things about my family…I try and keep …calm, but if they keep going on and I lose my temper they'll know why…and they'll understand'.

5.2.4.2 Educational engagement

It was not only young people's behaviour that was affected by their care histories, but also their ability to concentrate and learn at school. As Priya put it: 'I'm smart, basically it's that a lot of things were going wrong for me when I was doing my GCSEs and I couldn't concentrate'. Gilroy appeared to associate his dislike of school with the fact that he had entered education late:

> I've tried hard at it, since I've been in school, but I've never liked it…I joined primary school in Year 4, so I missed the whole…basics of school, so I'm learning; I'm trying to catch up.

Adam gave a powerful account of how difficult he found secondary school, explaining that despite his best efforts he really wasn't able to learn effectively from Years 7-10 –

even though he had a stable care placement and had attended the same secondary school throughout:

> we went to LODT [learning support unit] and the teacher would teach us how to spell, write, count, and all stuff like that, from Year 7…it would just confuse me…I did work hard, but I was just not learning, but all of a sudden your brain just clicks. It's weird how it happens…because in the beginning it just goes out of your head, what goes in comes out.

In Year 10, however, it all came together, and to his great credit Adam achieved six or seven A*s at Key Stage 4, saying: 'My brain feels like it's there, and my head feels like it's on my shoulders now'.

Similarly, when discussing placement moves, Tasmin explained 'I wouldn't be able to concentrate, and like my mind would wander, and I'd be like worried all the time, so kind of like had an effect on my education…like I'd always be in trouble'. This affected her relationship with some teaching staff:

> I used to dread coming to school on days I had teachers that I didn't get on with, because I was like I can't be bothered for that lesson…And like I find it really hard to control my anger, like I get angry, and then I'm angry for ages, and I just like won't talk to anyone.

Although Tasmin's own anger had resolved now she was settled in her placement, her brother's behaviour affected her ability to study to the extent that she was thinking of moving in with her sister: 'I want to stay with him but he puts so much pressure when I'm trying to do work, I want to focus on my studies'.

For a few young people, such as Priya, who was out of education, training or employment throughout the period of the study, the outstanding issues in her personal life appeared to preclude her being able to engage at all: 'it's not like I don't want to go into education, my life just needs to be sorted out properly first before I can deal with something like that'. Priya's explanation resonates with Coleman's focal model of adolescence, as does Ms Tan's account of a young person whose mother had rejected him for twelve or thirteen years before taking him back home when she had addressed her own problems, in the middle of his GCSE years:

> she really got her life together in a big way, and I admired her a lot, but [he] reverted back to being about four years old, because he'd missed out on being

> with his mum, and having that whole relationship, so he went from focusing on getting GCSEs to being absolutely focused on needing his mum. So he was about six foot four and…couldn't bear to be away from her... I've never seen such a dramatic turnaround...he needed to resolve those issues far more than getting an education. But you try and explain that to Ofsted.

Kayla similarly acknowledged that her school work had suffered when she first turned eighteen and had focused attention on her family relationships:

> I was struggling in the beginning…because I was able to see my family, and it was like confusing me with my schoolwork, everything was just getting too much, and now that I've balanced it out I've managed to be on top of my work.

5.2.4.3 Supporting young people in school

These difficulties were acknowledged by designated teachers and virtual heads. A significant advantage of the virtual school system was evidenced in enhanced communication to schools of the background and needs of new entrants into care and better links between social care and education. Professionals highlighted the fact that children entering care in Year 8 or later were likely to have a history of instability in their personal lives and their education, including considerable involvement in and understanding of the procedures leading to their entry into care. As a result 'they are a lot angrier' (Ms Lea) and 'there are all kinds of things that need to go in first before there's going to be any kind of fruitful learning or engagement' (Ms Mason). Some young people, even in Year 11, 'couldn't really engage in education, let alone exams, at all' (Mr Brook), or as Ms Tan poignantly said:

> some children are so desperately damaged and hurt and mangled and emotionally crippled, that…there's no cork in the bottom of their bowl, so whatever you pour into them it pours right out again.

Professionals also recognised that behaviour at school was often much less challenging than behaviour in the placement, and it was important for the school to be supportive of carers: 'the fact that they get them in the taxi and get them to go to school is a major battle, and that's the one to win…and sometimes I'll say to them "let school deal with the school issues"' (Ms Teal).

Ms Olive taught GCSEs over one year where possible, to try to ensure that where there was disruption during Years 10-11 children still left with some qualifications: she was

head teacher of an SEBD school with many children placed out of borough (The Grove). She had lost two fifteen-year-olds in the twelve months before I met her as a result of children making unauthorised contact with family members through technology such as Facebook. In one case, the child was so distressed by the information they uncovered that there were violent incidents at home, resulting in two emergency foster placements and a return to his birth family at the end of Year 10, no school placement at all during Year 11 and reports of involvement in drugs.

Other designated teachers in non-mainstream schools reflected on the inherent tension between focusing on social and behavioural issues - without which educational qualifications would remain inaccessible to young people - and the importance of qualifications for success in adult life. This quandary is reflected in the academic literature in Berridge et al.'s controversial use of the term 'low achievement' in place of 'underachievement' for this group of young people (Berridge et al., 2008). Ms Tan explained:

> I want children to be able to read and write, to be able to realise that education is a way forward to make their lives completely different…But actually leaving with five A-Cs is neither here nor there, what it is for them is…to be in a position where they can access adult life, and make some real, positive, choices. And that's what I feel we are about really.

Ms Carmine, though, was aware of the need to ensure a viable pathway post-16 if young people were to have a chance in life:

> They all had a disrupted education…and in terms of their outcome before they came would have been to take no exams at all, that's how we started out, it was meant to be like hands-on skills for life really, but we got to a situation where I think hold on a minute, if I want that transition from sixteen plus I'll have to put other things in place, so that's where the functional skills came in…and the GCSEs….level two, really, is what we'd be aiming for, if they were with us at Year 10…so as long as they've got that in English and maths, ICT, most of the courses are open to them, for college.

She too, however, acknowledged that supporting young people to obtain qualifications was only a part of the work that she did and that it was about more than a passport to the next educational stage:

> Not only that…sense of achievement, just improvement on their outlook on life really…it's not just about getting them to the end, the whole child really, you've got to think about, there's emotional development, social development.

5.3 **Corporate parenting in practice**

Although it is apparent from the first section of this chapter that providing children with a care placement in which they can genuinely feel part of the family unit is challenging and may perhaps become more so as young people move through adolescence, there were other aspects of young people's experiences of care that compounded a sense of difference and were likely to promote excessive self-reliance (Cameron, 2007). These included the way in which decision-making was vested as between carers and social workers or local authority management; the extent to which young people and their carers felt under an intrusive degree of surveillance; and the high turnover of social workers. This section considers the effect of looked-after status on young people's daily lives from the perspectives of both young people and professionals.

5.3.1 ***Being 'looked-after'***

Most, but not all, of the young people were reluctant for their care status to be widely known (Harker et al., 2004), which limited the extent to which they could be open with their peers. Adam, for example, said that none of his friends knew he was in care in Year 11, although most of the teachers knew. Gilroy said:

> I only tell people who I know will keep secrets, and I can really, really trust…there are two kids I really trust in this school, that I told, but it's like other people I won't tell them nothing about my lifestyle.

The girls often took care only to tell their 'close friends' (Tasmin, Imogen) or 'best friends' (Kayla). Jacinda said 'I told my best friend, but the others don't need to know', while Priya told none of her friends at school. Participants were concerned that they would be treated differently by peers and/or staff:

> I don't want to feel like I'm out of the ordinary…I want to be treated as an equal (Devora).

> I want to be like the same, I don't want to be different (Imogen).
>
> I don't want to be treated different compared to everyone else (Elliott).
>
> I don't think hardly anyone knows that I am, I don't kind of like to show it off to anyone, because I don't know, I'm sometimes scared they might treat me differently, but everyone thinks I'm just like them, so it's good (Kayla).
>
> Everyone has this negative stereotype of people that are like in care, because like…the media and stuff…I know quite a few people, and people that went to school, are nothing like the stereotype, and one of them's working and got an apprenticeship … and doing really well…the stereotype's really annoying and it sticks to you through life as well…Yeah, I think most of them kind of like stick to like near care as well, doing care work I noticed, a lot of them go back to being social workers or foster carers or like counsellors….Yeah, I don't fit that stereotype, it's quite annoying, it gets on my nerves (Tasmin).

Michael went so far as to deny being in care if people asked, saying 'they don't know at all. If they do say that I say 'no', I deny it…if they know I'm in care they might treat me differently, they might use it as an excuse to bully me'. He used his foster carers' surname instead of his birth family name. Callum, on the other hand, had been open about his care status and suffered the consequences:

> They know…Don't mind that…They used to take the Mick ages ago, when I first told them….Saying that my mum didn't want me, stuff like that…They said they were joking about it, they don't do it anymore, so...

In Year 13, Callum explained his circumstances in greater detail, including the fact that he had not been allowed to see his mother for some years and that she had self-harmed, stabbing herself on one occasion. Understandably, school taunts in such circumstances were more than he could handle: 'that was an excuse to bunk all my lessons and I used to get angry and get into loads of fights, you know, people'd say something about my parents…that was the main excuse'.

Those who did not mind others knowing their care status were young people who were effectively already singled out through their education or placements. These included Niall, one of only nine boys in his private alternative education provision; Qadira, whose peers in the referral units she attended knew her status; Habib, (also in a PRU) who said simply 'some of them know…it's not an issue'; and Riley, who was in

residential care and said: 'everyone knew I was in care; it doesn't bother me that people know'.

Most of the young people accepted that some or all of their teachers needed to know their care status, and that it brought them additional support, but would have preferred for them not to have been told. Priya said: 'every teacher knew my business, and that's why I don't like it, I like things to stay private'. When asked if she thought teachers needed to know, Jacinda said 'Not really. It's the past…I guess I don't really mind, but…it's weird knowing that all the teachers…know your business'. Jacinda had taken steps to ensure she was not singled out:

> I felt like I wasn't with my real family, and I didn't feel I was normal, but then I got used to it after a while, at first when they had all the…meeting it used to be in school and I used to be pulled out of class, and everybody would be like 'what happened, what happened?' And I used to feel like the attention was on me, and I complained, and after that they decided to do it after school…Yeah, because I felt it was not a good thing. I think they should do that with other children in care. Then they'll feel like they fit in, instead of having to be pulled out of classes and people asking questions and you don't want to answer them.

For the most part designated teachers in mainstream schools were sensitive to the importance of respecting young people's privacy but recognized that this could affect the way in which they were able to undertake their role. Mr Green described his experience of the looked-after children at Fairfields:

> most of the time they really don't want to talk to me, understandably so…they are really, really resistant to talking about it, and [Elliott] …just doesn't want to talk about looked-after issues…I spent a lot of time talking to him in the week, we had a dance show on, and he'll talk about anything, and when I asked him if he'd do this [the interview] I was really amazed that he agreed…but he just doesn't want to talk about it with *me*…We had one go to university last year …who absolutely would not speak to me. I mean again she would talk to me about anything [else]…She wouldn't attend PEPs [Personal Education Plan meetings], didn't want anything, just came in and got on with her work, and I think she got three straight As in the end.

Ms Willow at Millbank College recounted her experience of a young woman on whose account she had been called to a meeting:

> They want to be like everybody else, and not be isolated for any reason…I went down to her, and I called her out, and I said "look, I just need to talk to you because I've been called to a meeting, and it occurred to me I didn't even know

> you were in care, but actually I need to find out from you before I go how you are settling into college, are there any issues…?" She was quite clear "I'm not going to discuss it with you". And I said "OK, just come to my office, let's go over your attendance and the rest of it, I will go to this meeting and tell them as far as you are concerned everything is fine"…And I've only ever seen her in passing again…and she looks at me and you can see that look of fear come over her face, and I just go "hi, how are you doing", and walk on. But there's that fear, because she's told no one, not even her tutor…and I think if you inadvertently destroy that confidence you do far more harm than good in a way.

Ms White, Ms Teal and Ms Gold stressed that they tried to undertake their role as discreetly as possible:

> I think most of them prefer it if I stay out of their way, because they don't like to be identified as being different, so I'll only meet them if I absolutely have to… I mean usually the contact that they would have would be mostly with their head of year (Ms White).

Nonetheless, young people's sense that their personal lives were public property within schools appeared to be borne out to a significant extent. Schools varied as to the extent of information that was shared, but most regarded it as important that all staff were aware of which children were looked-after, so that teachers understood the children's circumstances and allowances could be made if necessary:

> at the beginning of the year we have an inset day, and I make all staff aware who the looked-after children are, and how to manage them, I suppose, in their behaviour, and if there are any issues with their education that they should contact me. And I do that regularly…because teachers do sometimes forget, and don't realise that there's other issues surrounding a child's education…sometimes dealing with a looked-after child might be different to dealing with another student, you know, in terms of confrontation, and keeping in touch with a carer, and letting me know as well (Ms White).

> One of the big roles I've always thought I have is to explain our children to the teachers, because lots of our teachers are very young, very inexperienced, like Teach First, for example, wonderful, bright…head spinning with the idealism, but staggeringly naïve (Mr Brown).

> Everyone knows, so on their registers they will know who the looked-after children are in their class. (Ms Rose).

> We publish the register of students who work with learning support, and we also publish the list of vulnerable students, so staff are aware of where the pressures

> are and which students we are monitoring and tracking, in specific detail (Ms Gold).

Schools appeared to take a paternalistic attitude to information-sharing, which in most cases was not something young people had any control over or knowledge of:

> I see myself as being the advocate for that child inside the school…I remember with our previous head we used to talk about the role, that was the main thing, you are like the extra parent, the advocate for that child, if that child is not doing well you will talk to the teachers. But the child themselves will not be aware of that (Mr Brown).

> *And do children get any say in the matter?*
> We don't ask them. … when we mention it to staff, we do say… this is not something we want you to address with the student… But we feel it's quite important, because they need to know the family circumstances… not why they are in care, but that they are in care, and so when you speak to them it won't be mum or dad, it will be a guardian, and sometimes they are taxied in and out as well, so arranging after-school detentions and things is not as straightforward as it might be with ordinary children… And also containing that information… I don't think everybody needs to know why that child is in care, and what the issues are. That's confidential, and I think the more people that know those things the less confidential it is (Ms White).

> I have an hour, every September, at the beginning of school… where I would introduce new students to school, and it's only three or four who are the most challenging, …so we have two looked-after this year…when they were coming in Year 7 I did have a lot to explain what the circumstances were, what the issues are, how they can help them out…if there are very specific things that are happening in their lives we have a good system of communication with their pastoral leaders, and then we would let them know what's happening, and it would be passed on to teachers, as much as they need to know, that maybe in this particular period she might be slightly unusual, so just bear that in mind, there is something else going on (Ms Rose).

> With looked-after children it tends to be a conversation with subject staff as the students approach each academic year, because it's particularly important with the core subjects, when it's likely that we'll offer tuition in school, and they'll also probably be offered one-to-one tuition outside of school, so in terms of matching that's when we would share that information, so things inside and outside are matched (Ms Gold).

Colleges appeared more likely to respect confidentiality, with Ms Willow observing that although she would ask young people if they would mind her sharing their status with

their teaching team, she would generally respect their wishes if they asked her not to 'because I think at the end of it they need that respect, they need to know that we will respect their wishes'. Instead, she might flag up with staff, with the students' agreement, that she was working with a student, so that they were aware that they should contact her before taking action on an issue themselves.

In non-mainstream schools it appeared usual for all staff to know the child's status, but because of the nature of the institutions, this was less likely to cause them to stand out from others:

> *to what extent is there a distinction between the looked-after cohort and the rest for you?*
> Well actually there isn't for me, other than the baggage that a looked-after child can bring…given the nature of my pupils' difficulties quite a few have strong… CAMHS [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services] involvement, quite a few are on the CP [child protection] register…quite a few will have professional network meetings and emergency meetings…you have to look at them on an individual basis (Ms Olive).

> there will be children who are given more one-to-one than looked-after children, more social interaction, because they need it because of their educational needs…we don't think 'looked-after child'…they just happen to be looked-after children…But what we do with them in school, and how we kind of support the families, isn't limited or expanded, the fact they are looked-after or not (Mr Grey).

> PEPs were shared with all their classroom teachers, of course, so they could see what their targets were, and every teacher would have a group information sheet for each class… which would have all their levels, their targets, and they would have a behavioural target and a learning target, and the looked-after children would also have another area where their aims were included, so all teachers should have been really clued up as to what was in place (Ms Coral).

Most schools had arrangements in place to try to avoid singling young people out in front of their peers, to ensure that young people did not need to interact with multiple staff members, and to make available to them members of staff with whom they were most likely to feel comfortable. Since the designated teacher role should now be held at a senior level within schools, this generally meant taking advantage of pastoral systems within the school or of administrative staff that young people came into contact with in any event: in Fairfields and Clifton, this was often the attendance officer, or 'just whoever they latch on to' (Mr Green, Fairfields). At Queen's, the school had recently

appointed two non-teaching pastoral leaders, who managed the PEPs, including ensuring that students completed their parts of the form, while at Garden House all students had achievement mentors, so they were the first point of contact for most issues and would manage the pre-PEP questionnaires. Ms Rose explained that:

> they are very familiar with their mentors, and they are very open with them, and they call them by their first names. I think if there are any issues they want us to raise they normally tell the mentors…sometimes they say 'I don't want to be there [at the PEP meeting], but can you please make sure you ask this', and we would normally do that.

At Woodhall, Mr Brown said that 'they know that I'm the person who will keep a general overall eye on them, but their first contact will be their form tutor, their head of student learning'. Similarly, Ms Coral stated:

> it was kind of very low key really, it was sort of like a watchful eye…from a distance, rather than me meeting them regularly…their tutors would have taken responsibility for them, just like any other child…but they were all made fully aware who I was, and what my role was, and that my office door was always open.

Ms Gold, too, took a 'hands-off' approach:

> support needs to be discreet…And I know in some schools the designated teacher will meet very, very, regularly with students to see how their progress is. I suppose my view on it is that I will assess and establish and revisit things as and when I feel it's the right time to.

Mr Green summed up the impossibility of avoiding disclosures that would be unwelcome to young people:

> I think we are pretty honest with them. But… they just don't want the staff to know… we'll say to them 'who do you need to tell? Who do I need to tell about this?' And they say 'no-one'. And I say 'I need to tell Miss [X], I'll tell [the attendance officer] because she's easy to get hold of, and kind of knows these things, and I'll tell your tutor, and I'd like to tell your teachers'. And they'll say 'no'… if you try and involve them in it they just don't want anybody to know, which is fair enough.

5.3.2 ***Parenting by corporation***

5.3.2.1 Surveillance, intrusion, bureaucracy and delay

The unwelcome sense of being subject to a greater degree of scrutiny than their peers at school was mirrored for many young people in their home lives. Unquestionably, there is a need for foster care to be monitored by social services and this was illustrated in the case of Niall's carer, who Ms Carmine felt was not an appropriate carer and whose status was revoked by the local authority during the course of the study. She said:

> The carer that he's with is not an official foster carer…It's from when he went to a school called [x], he was friends with one of the students there, and it's a parent from there… She's had a CRB done, but… it's kind of an unofficial basis, but they've left him there…basically, I'm just picking up the pieces.

However, the level of surveillance was a source of considerable frustration for some young people. Qadira stated she disliked her first social worker 'because she was just too much in your business, I don't like that'. Monitoring arrangements appeared to be especially problematic where foster carers were employed by a private agency which was then overseen by the local authority. Tasmin was particularly outspoken on the subject and wished that her foster carer could be given greater control over day-to-day decision-making, something that the government has now introduced (see section 3.4.1). Whether this will ameliorate the level of surveillance felt by young people like Tasmin, however, is debatable:

> she has to write notes every day about us, and it's so annoying…Just like what we've done in the day, if we've been bad, or like if we're rude…I feel like I'm in the Big Brother house….She has to write notes about us and then send them to the social worker, it's like she's checking up on us every day… And she was like 'well I can't not write them', she has to follow procedures, and I know, fair enough, but I still think it's a bit rude that they make her do it. I feel like I'm being watched all the time. It's ridiculous.

When asked about the issues looked-after students were most likely to come to her about, Ms Willow at Millbank College cited difficulties in placements, often to do with perceived surveillance, including young people who were not allowed to use their mobile phones unless in the hearing of the foster carer, on loudspeaker, where there were constraints on contact with their birth family.

Devora and her carer, who was her cousin, decided to apply for a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) to discharge the care order and end the local authority's involvement. Devora said 'she's just fed up with all the paperwork that they give her that she has to do for me, and it takes up all her time doing all that work, it's just really stressful for her'. Unfortunately, although the order was the local authority's suggestion, Devora and her carer had to resort to instructing a solicitor to reach agreement on the terms of the support under the SGO. Devora was not many months short of eighteen before the order was passed, partially because the process started before she transferred to the leaving care team, and was disrupted by that move, which itself was delayed until she was over seventeen.

Delay could cause considerable difficulties for young people at this time in their lives. Priya blamed missing out on a place at college on delay in her post being forwarded from her former foster carer to her new accommodation, because she obtained her acceptance letter after the date on which she should have attended the induction day. Jacinda nearly missed a holiday because of difficulties obtaining her passport: 'my mum messaged the manager, and then messaged the manager of that manager, they took so long, so she started messaging higher people, and eventually they sorted it out'. Imogen had been unable to see her birth family for 'quite a while' in Year 12 because she was waiting for social services to arrange it: Jacinda, in contrast, after her experiences with the passport, had taken matters into her own hands to ensure that she saw her mother on her birthday ('they just took so long, and in the end I just did my own ticket, sent them an email of my ticket telling them how much it was, and then went up myself'). Farouk and Devora both had to wait a considerable length of time for social services to apply for a National Insurance number for them. Farouk also felt left in limbo when his college registration was revoked because of his immigration status at the start of Year 12 and he could not even join a local football club without the local authority's agreement. There was very little he could do with his time and he was feeling quite low when we met, explaining:

> I know they've gone low [his footballing skills], I've put on weight as well…I used to play football nearly every day, that used to keep me fit. Now I'm having to go on my own and like jog around the park and all that, and sometimes I go football for a different club…I asked my social worker if I can join, but she's taking a long time to get back to me…It's just extra-curriculum so I don't know why it's taking

> so long…you have to pay for registration, and like when you go training you have to pay two pound, and the match is two pound as well.

Callum was involved in a road traffic accident in Year 12 and needed a taxi to school. When I met him that year, he had only started back at school that week, although he had wanted to return two or three weeks earlier ('because I knew I was missing such a lot of work'), but his social worker had not made the necessary arrangements until then. Kayla's laptop had broken down in January of Year 13 and had still not been returned to her when we met at the end of March, so she had to write all her coursework out by hand. Jacinda had needed to prove her looked-after status to obtain the bursary from her college, but was at the time between social workers:

> they were saying that they needed a letter, and I was messaging the manager at social services, and they took so long, so I ended up just taking a load of old letters that proved I was, and then eventually they believed me.

Often, the source of frustration lay in the fact that it was difficult to obtain timely (or any) responses to requests and yet social workers appeared to undertake many tasks that seemed unnecessary to young people, and to visit or complete administrative tasks for no specific purpose other than regular monitoring. Imogen said 'they always give you this form that you have to fill out, always, all the time, and nothing ever happens'. Riley tolerated rather than drew support from contact from his personal advisor, who initiated contact 'normally when she wants to get something done', such as a review meeting or consent to disclose information. He said of his experience of social workers, 'all they do is come out, not very often, see how you are, and that's it, go away again…they don't do anything' but he added, 'I'm not fussed. I don't think I need it'. In terms of financial support from the local authority, he said 'I don't get any more, since I turned eighteen everything stopped, it's like they've shut the door and said "bye"'.

Over time those young people that I interviewed on more than one occasion became more open about things that had frustrated them. In Year 13, for example, in answer to the question as to whether he had a good relationship with his social worker, Callum said:

> I do, yeah, but the problem with her is she is a bit, I don't know, lazy… she just leaves things to the last minute, like with my flat…sorry about this, we asked her ages before my eighteenth to try and sort out a flat, just getting ready for when I'm eighteen, but she left it until the last minute, and...my provisional driving

> license, I've got that now, but...we asked her sometime in the beginning of 2012 to get it done and I only got it in September I think, it took ages. She is a good social worker but she is very slow at doing things.

A number of designated teachers from non-mainstream schools were outspoken in their criticism of multi-agency working with children's social care, including Mr Grey:

> I mean if we are trying to work together to act as a concerned, well-managed parent, we are not doing the job, because we do not link as a well-managed parent…School does one job, the foster parent does one job…We link together well, very well… and that's on a daily basis…And then social system comes in when they need to come in, to do their admin…It's strong to say it's dysfunctional. I'd say there's a long way to go to get this tight circle around the child.

5.3.2.2 Social worker continuity

Some of the problems appeared to derive at least in part from the high turnover of social workers. When asked what she thought was the worst thing about being in care, Devora replied 'them taking their time to do things…so many social workers'. It is frustrating that, despite this issue having been highlighted in the literature repeatedly (Cashmore 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Berridge et al., 2008), it remains a core defect in looked-after children's experience of the care system. Social worker continuity was raised repeatedly by young people throughout the study. The quotations below demonstrate the scale of the problem and young people's feelings on the subject:

> I'm not happy about the social worker because the social worker was changing, because like if you stay with the same social worker they understand more about you… in the long-term…they know you very well, and you know them as well, so you know how they work, and they know how you work as well…it's better to have, I would say, like one social worker, and not change (Bashir).

> I've had about five or six social workers in my care life, and none of them have really worked out…Too many social workers just coming in and out. Just too much. (Callum).

> I've had oh so many social workers…in the summer I had a social worker, and then I had another one, and then I have another one, and then she's just said that she's not going to be on my case anymore because she's got a different job in that office…and I'm gonna get another one, so that's just in the space of…six months?...so many social workers. I think it's really bad that, because some children in care are worse off than me, being abused, and they need that one steady thing in their life, and they don't even really get that (Devora).

How many social workers have you had since you've been in care?
I lost count, I don't know. So many. (Habib).

So how many have you had altogether now?
I have no idea, they keep on changing…
What happened to the last one?

I don't actually know. I only had her to do my pathway plan, and then she left. (Imogen Year 12: by Year 13, she had had three social workers just from the Leaving Care team).

How many have you had altogether?
Can't count…I can't even remember some of their names because they just come and they go, and they come and they go….Half of them I don't remember, don't remember their names…They come and go so quickly…(Jacinda).

They are very frequently changed…I've had like, I'd say seven, but either one's gone on maternity leave, or just had a baby and not coming back, or reorganization, they just move on to another job or do something else (Kayla).

So how many social workers have you had in the last … four years?
About seven, eight…In the past year I've had four (Niall).

Designated teachers commented on the difficulties that discontinuity of social workers and stretched social services provision created for inter-agency working, timely service provision, and stability in school:

> we worked with a number of boroughs… the social workers from [one] were really good, and really on it, the social workers from [another] were totally overstretched…they were totally disorganised, and often unable to attend meetings, or would cancel meetings. The old story…Social workers would always be changing, that's the problem…and then you'd have to re-establish those relationships again. It was hard to keep track of social workers (Ms Coral).

> we struggle…to fill a lot of our social care roles… and it's very difficult to get the calibre of people if you are not willing to value them… I have worked with lots of social workers, some of them are massively brilliant… and some are overwhelmed, or confused, or don't really see, don't get it...sometimes you have to circumnavigate the people you work with to try and get to the core of helping somebody. And it prolongs getting action, it prolongs putting things together for somebody, and that's very frustrating (Ms Tan).

Mr Brown felt that 'the unsettling effect…on the students can be awful, because they are constantly, constantly, getting a new social worker', while Mr Grey, head of a special school, said 'the change rate of social services looking after children is worrying…thank God, with ours, [school] they have this kind of tight link within the framework, so that doesn't really mess them up'. Mr Black referred to social work retention problems as placing 'a huge amount of pressure on all those trying to support young people'. Ms Rose commented that it was much easier where social workers knew their young clients well, so that young people could confide in them, but that often that did not seem to be the case.

5.3.2.3 Relationships with social workers

The direct result of the high social worker turnover, bureaucracy and delays recounted above was that almost all young people described poor relationships with their social workers, although they were generally hesitant to criticize social services' provision and appreciative of individuals who were supportive of them. Bashir, for example, was grateful for the effort his social worker had invested in getting his case for tuition approved through the local authority's panel procedures ('she really worked for it'), while Adam's social worker had 'put in all the effort, I couldn't ask for more off [sic] her really'. Farouk, however, distinguished between the apparent motivation of his current and previous social workers: 'she don't really look supportive…she looks like she's just trying to do her job and that's it, unlike my other social worker, who looked like he kind of wanted to help us'.

When asked whether the staff at her secure unit were supportive, Unity replied:

> Some were and some weren't. I think it's the same as everywhere you go, you get some people that are really doing their job because they want to help you and then some people that are doing it just because it's a job and they don't really actually care.

Gilroy described his social worker as 'just dopey' but did not elaborate. Asked whether there was a 'worst thing' about being in care, Kayla said:

> Sometimes with social workers that don't listen to us …. since we were little we've been asking to see our cousins, our auntie and our nan, and our nan had passed away on Easter Friday a couple of years ago, we'd been asking to see her

> for ages…So that's really, that's what I don't like, when they don't hear our requests[11].

Frustration at not being listened to could lead to young people disengaging or to active hostility. Tasmin explained why she saw little of her social worker:

> I don't turn up because I don't like her…Because I'll ask her stuff and then she just won't get back to you. And then like she's never even in England…you call the office, ask where she is, and it's either she's busy or she's on holiday.

Priya justified her behaviour in terms of forcing social services to take notice:

> It's not really playing up, it's when I say something to social services and they don't listen it's very irritating. So I do stuff that makes them notice, and hear me, because they don't listen when I talk with my mouth, unless I do something with my actions, that's the only time they listen.

It is important to note that it was apparent from their comments in interview that young people were looking for a very different relationship with their social worker than they expected or wanted from educational professionals. Gilroy and Priya were both critical of tutors at their colleges for being 'too young': in that context they wanted someone they could respect and they were there to learn, a view echoed by Habib. Gilroy described his experience at college as

> shit...rubbish… couldn't control them, well, couldn't control me especially, I don't know about the others...some listened to him and some didn't. He's too young to be a tutor… just didn't have the thing, just too young.

Priya said she left college because 'the teacher chatted too much basically, she used to sit down and have a conversation with us instead of teaching us, she's quite young'. However young people's relationships with social workers were much more personal, and understanding rather than respect was the most important factor. Qadira said:

> the first one, she didn't know how to talk to me…I probably would be in college by now, but…she didn't know how to persuade me to go….my leaving care social worker, she just knew how to talk to me.

Similarly, Jacinda when asked if any of her social workers stood out, said

[11] It appeared that after her grandmother's death, Kayla was informed that she would have needed a court order to be permitted contact to her extended family.

> my last one was alright, I just remember her because she was my last one, she was quite young, so she understood, she would talk to me like I was …the same age sort of thing.

Adam was the only one of the group to express regret at a change of social worker as he moved to the Leaving Care team, attributing this to the longevity of their relationship ('she's been there for me over the years') and his late transfer to the Leaving Care team to the fact that 'my social worker wanted to keep hold of me'. His new social worker took the trouble to see him monthly to start with 'because he needs to see me more now to find out more about me', in contrast to reports from most young people that social workers made contact according to their administrative agendas, rather than young people's wishes or needs.

Adam's experience was exceptional in this study, however. The high turnover of social workers obviously made it difficult for most young people to form relationships with many of their social workers, but many felt let down by them. Riley's explanation was typical: 'I just don't get on with social workers…Because they say they'll do something and they don't, or they'll say they'll come and see you and they don't'. Unity had four or five social workers, but said she did not have a good relationship with any, adding

> the one I've got now is the best relationship that I've ever had with a social worker, and that's even…we get on, do you know what I mean?...I think…for a lot of years I didn't like them because of my past experience with my first social worker, and that was awful…I don't think she knew her job at all, she didn't have a clue what was best for me…just felt that she didn't do anything to help me, to listen to me…What she wanted to do, was easiest for her, sort of thing.

In Year 12, Kayla was looking forward to developing a relationship with her leaving care social worker. She had seen her only once in the first six months or so since she had been appointed, but had recently met her again and 'we decided to meet as frequently as we can' and every six weeks was set down in her review. She described how they would 'go to like the coffee shop and have some hot chocolate and stuff, and just be casual, that was nice….I like her, she's like me, we are both crazy together'. When we met in Year 13, Kayla was supposed to see her social worker every three months, but explained 'now that I'm eighteen it's harder to get in contact with her…so if I text her she might not text me back, or she'll text me back ten days later'. Kayla thought she had enjoyed good relationships with her social workers, but to an extent this appeared to be because her expectations were low. She said 'I think my social

workers have all been nice, they wouldn't just abandon us whenever' and that she did not mind the frequent changes. But she added:

> usually I don't like changes, but with social workers I think it's different, I know they are not going to stay for the longest time period as they say they would, so I just get used to it, and say "oh we are getting a new social worker, OK".

These accounts suggest that the high turnover of social work staff and pressured working conditions undermine the potential for effective practice. The International Federation of Social Workers' definition of the function of the social work profession has been adopted by the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) (2012: page 6) and states:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments.

There was little evidence in this study of such relationship-based practice in young people's accounts of their interactions with the professionals entrusted with their empowerment, but in some cases problems ran deeper than the avoidance of committing to a relationship that was likely to be transient or unreliable. Tasmin, for example, was supposed to be undertaking life story work, but she had a particularly problematic relationship with her social worker, such that undertaking such sensitive work was likely to do more harm than good: 'I just want to get rid of her…she gets me really upset and it brings up like anxiety'. Despite her own difficulties with her brother's behaviour, which included stealing from her, she was concerned to protect him from what she saw as poor social work intervention: 'they were just saying oh what they think's best for my brother, and I'm like "no it's not…he's a piece of paper, and your pay cheque, you really don't know him"'. Unity's explanation for her extremely difficult behaviour was 'I just think that I didn't like my social worker, an absolute bitch, I don't think she really thought about how I felt'.

Some young people, such as Habib and Gilroy and the young women in supported housing (Priya, Qadira and Unity), reported better relationships with their key workers than their social workers, but these again appeared to be transient relationships. At eighteen, Priya, Qadira and Unity would no longer be entitled to the services of the

specialist care leavers' charity supporting them. Vulnerable young adults such as Niall would be passed to the transitional team, although all care leavers are entitled to the support of a personal advisor under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 until age 21 (or up to 25 if they continue in education and training).

5.3.2.4 Resilience and self-reliance

The cumulative effect of high social work turnover, delay and bureaucratic procedures on young people's engagement with social services tended to manifest in participants taking control over their own lives as far as possible and many demonstrated considerable initiative in doing so. In many cases the consequences of such self-reliance were positive, but it was noticeable that this group comprised young people who described generally good levels of support from social workers and/or carers. Adam was very appreciative of support from his carers, school and social workers, but quick to point out that his success would be down to his own endeavours, coupled with good peer relationships:

> In the beginning I didn't have much support…but I always tried to work hard and whatever I was provided with I'll do what I've got to do…It's nice to have support, but it can still be done, if you've got friends then you can do it…because if I'm not going to do it no one's going to do it for me, are they? You've got to have commitment.

Kayla could have accessed additional support at school in Year 13, but explained:

> I choose not to because if I get to uni I'm not going to be like "can I have additional support?" Because someone's not gonna be on my back all the time to tell me to catch up, so I'd rather learn to do it myself than have someone do it for me all the time.

Riley didn't seek assistance from his personal advisor because 'I can do it on my own, don't need them'. The local authority had tried to move him back nearer his home address when he had had to leave the residential care home, but he had refused to go, because he knew that he needed to stay away from the people who had led him into trouble in the first place. Bashir and Sofia, both unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, appeared somewhat self-contained, with Bashir choosing not to ask for additional help from his carers if he felt it might be 'unfair' to make demands on them,

and Sofia stating she had made just one friend at Fairfields, and otherwise she did not talk to anyone. If she had a problem, she said, 'I always have myself'.

Other young people, however, appeared resistant to seeking support because of their experiences. Callum acknowledged that his carer thought that his education was 'very important' and could probably help with issues such as choosing options for the sixth form, but he said 'I just do it all by myself'. Although he had been living with that carer for over four years at the time of the first interview, this attitude is understandable in the context of a placement where he was not happy. Habib had taken to arranging to see his younger siblings himself because his carer was 'not the type of woman' who would arrange it for him. With hindsight, Habib also felt that his expulsion from school was unfair and seemed to suggest that someone should have stood up for him at the time: 'I couldn't defend for myself. I was young and didn't know. If that was me [now] and I could talk for myself…I wouldn't have gone to [PRU]'. Priya, whose child had seemingly been removed from her care, was more explicit, recounting that 'social services gave me a lot of responsibility after having a child, so I had to do everything for myself, so I did.'

The most vulnerable young people were often those who were most adamant that they controlled decisions in their lives, although this was not borne out by the circumstances in which they found themselves, as these young people were more likely to have dropped out of college and/or become NEET as the study progressed. Gilroy, for example, when asked how much control he felt he had had over decisions in his life stated: 'most of it really…I make my own decisions...if I want to do something I do it'. Qadira stated that she did not listen to her mother, so I asked her to whom she did listen and she replied: 'I like listening to myself, and doing things in my own way. I don't like listening to no-one'. In Year 12 she explained that she often applied for apprenticeships but didn't attend because she 'couldn't be bothered' or was ill. She elaborated:

> it's just myself. I need to make myself do it. No-one can make me do it, it has to be me…it depends on the way…the outside is going, like with family and stuff like that, with friends…and if I'm happy…then of course I'll attend, but if I'm grumpy and that I won't.

Unity had a similar attitude:

> I think it's all down to myself, whether I want to do it or not, it's all about no one can make you do what you don't want, do you know what I mean? It's up to yourself, and whether you want to achieve it, put your mind to it.

These young people's accounts chime with Stein's description of 'survivors' as considering themselves to be self-reliant, but in reality continuing to be dependent on welfare benefits and social services; and of 'strugglers' becoming alienated from or rejecting of professional support. More detailed consideration of Stein's categorisation of care leavers is undertaken in section 7.3.1.

5.4 **Leaving care arrangements**

5.4.1 ***Moving to live independently***

5.4.1.1 Opting for independence

The initiative and self-reliance exhibited by young people may account in part for the tendency for living independently to become more attractive to them as they aged through the study. This finding appeared to apply to some of the young people in successful, stable placements as well as to those who were less settled. Stability in care placements is a key predictor of successful educational outcomes for looked-after young people (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; O'Sullivan et al., 2013). Legislation to allow many more young people to remain in their foster placements until the age of 21 has recently come into force (Children and Families Act 2014), after a successful pilot of the *Staying Put* initiative (Munro et al., 2012), as set out in section 2.2.4. However, the pilot was only made available to young people with 'established familial relationships' (page 6) with their carers and who were engaged in education, employment or training or able to demonstrate a commitment to being so. As acknowledged by the authors of the study report, these conditions rule out a proportion of care leavers, including some of the most vulnerable.

Ms Tan unconsciously endorsed the initiative, but commented on the scarcity of foster carers who genuinely treated their foster children as they would their own:

> you want them to have caring adults around them who will care for them until they are nineteen, and twenty five, and thirty, who will be there for them, just like my family was there for me all my life. And they are a rare commodity, finding foster carers who will say I've taken on this child, I will not give up on this child no matter how unbearable they become…It is a job and you get paid for it, but it's not a job.

In this study, a surprising number of participants presented themselves as actively choosing independence, even where they described a good relationship with their carers and could have stayed beyond the age of eighteen. Bashir, for example, despite stating that he treated his foster carers like his new parents when he came to the UK because he knew he had lost his family, explained:

> I wouldn't prefer to stay with my carer. I want to be more independent…I've made roots with them, but not…as strong as if it was my own parents, obviously. I'll be leaving when I'm eighteen, but I'm still going to be in contact with them...because they've helped us quite a lot.

Adam, too, decided not to remain with his carers. In Year 11 he had said that although social services would pay his carer only until he reached eighteen, 'my carer said because she's so nice I can stay with her until I want'. But in Year 13 he was planning to move, explaining 'I'd rather have the accommodation…I just think it's better to get on the ladder early, instead of late', although he thought it 'might be a bit scary at first'. Devora did not want to leave her cousin, but was conscious that she was a significant drain on her finances ('now that I've turned eighteen my guardian isn't getting any funding') and her carer had advised Devora to get on the housing ladder, too. Imogen could have stayed with her birth mother when her foster mother excluded her from her home, but did not because she liked the idea of having her own flat. Riley could have stayed in his supported lodgings until he was 21, but although he had a good relationship with his landlords he wanted 'to move out soon', partially because there was another young man there who had arrived after him, who kept disappearing, stealing, and damaging things. Farouk chose to leave his carers to live with his brother when he reached eighteen, and Priya reported that her aversion to living with strangers had eventually prompted social services to allow her to live in supported accommodation on her own.

5.4.1.2 Anxieties

The choice to opt for independent accommodation was made by young people despite their acute awareness of the financial and practical pressures they were likely to experience as a consequence:

> if you are living with your own parents and stuff it's obviously much more easier for you to kind of just concentrate on your studies and other things in your life as well (Bashir).

> I'm just worried if I can't get a job in the future, you know (Callum).

Adam was working eleven hours a day on Saturdays and Sundays in Year 13 ('it's just I need to get some more money to have behind me'), but would have to give up his job once he had a flat or his income support would be greatly reduced. Bashir was intending to work over the summer because he had been advised that his budget would be 'very tight' when he lived independently. Tasmin's carer had set her the task of living on £50 a week and was refusing to cook for her, to persuade her she should stay in foster care rather than move to live with her sister:

> just to prove that I couldn't do it. So I am gonna prove her wrong…I'm starting it tomorrow. I'm really scared about it. I'm dreading it. So everything's so expensive, all my food, because of everything I'm allergic to, so costs so much money.

Other young people had not chosen to live independently. Callum was pleased and proud to be placed with his aunt and uncle in Year 11. In Year 12 he concluded that he would prefer to stay with his aunt and uncle than live independently:

> my carer is my auntie, she's family, so it wouldn't be a problem anyway [to stay], …I won't be moving as soon as I'm eighteen, I want to stay for quite a while...Yeah, I don't want to move because it's my auntie and my uncle, and they are still my carers but they are my auntie and uncle.

Unfortunately the placement broke down and by Year 13 Callum was living independently. Callum, who had a history of criminal violence, was daunted by the prospect of living alone:

> I didn't want to move because I didn't think I could handle it. You know, at first I couldn't really handle it, living by myself, but now I can…My girlfriend, yeah, she helps a lot. Sometimes it does get very lonely as well, and she comes around, keeps me company, and she'll bring a couple of my friends as well…I mean at first I wasn't really comfortable, every little noise I would hear I would get scared. Living by myself I would just get really paranoid. Yeah, I would just get very lonely, but now, I'm used to it now, I'm getting used to it now.

Devora too, was worried:

> I actually had a housing interview on Tuesday and they said I'm gonna move out…because I'm eighteen now, and my guardian…thinks that I'm old enough to move out.

How do you feel about that?
Scared.

Adam, having dealt with his sense of rejection by his birth family by deciding to have no more to do with them, was concerned that he would be moved away from the area in which his foster carers live and back to be near his birth family:

> it's gonna be weird moving from this area which I'm brought up into, all the way back to … where all my family are...
>
> *And how do you feel about being back in [X]…?*
> …it's stupid, that's what everyone's saying now, it's not a really good idea. I don't really want to see them but you have no choice, you have to go back to that area.

Of those whose destinations were known, only Jacinda and Kayla, who were particularly close to their foster families, intended or expected to remain in their placements after leaving school or college. Kayla explained her decision in terms of making a gradual transition to independent living:

> my carers said I can stay, but if I get into my uni of my choice I'll live in halls of residence anyway, so it means I'm half moving out anyway, and then if I go on to my second year I'll ask my social worker for my flat, so I can just move from my halls of residence to my flat.

Jacinda intended to take her foster carer's advice:

> you know you can get a flat when you turn eighteen, but I don't think I'm going to take it until after uni, then I'd get a flat, that's what my mum told me to do. She said that's a better idea instead of struggling.

5.4.2 ***Negotiating multiple transitions***

Concurrent with the changes in placement or accommodation young people had to manage during this period were a number of other transitions. Although specialist leaving care services have been associated with increased entry into further education and higher numbers of care leavers in employment or training (Hai & Williams, 2004; Dixon et al., 2006), a number of professional participants expressed concern that preparation for GCSE qualifications often coincided with planning for leaving care and moving to college, exacerbating the considerable stress young people were already under. Mr Brook described 'a triple whammy, in terms of disruption', referring to young

people leaving school, moving from foster care to semi-independent accommodation, and losing their social worker in moving to the Leaving Care team. Mr Brown spoke of young people feeling as if they had been 'dropped' when they transferred to the Leaving Care team. Ms Olive had experienced increasingly in the recent past that arrangements for young people who had been assured of continuity ('yes, you'll stay in this foster care until eighteen, yes…you can attend a local college where you are living now') might change with the change of staff, sometimes triggering behavioural problems. Some participants also expressed concern that post-sixteen teams were not fully staffed by qualified social workers and that the knowledge and education of some staff 'is sometimes quite limited' (Mr Steel). Wadebridge and another local authority had disbanded their Leaving Care team in favour of social work continuity. Professionals who had experienced these arrangements felt that they worked better.

Designated teachers and virtual school staff recognised that sometimes it was unrealistic to expect looked-after young people to perform to their maximum academic potential in the face of placement uncertainty and disruption, when their grades were likely to be their 'last priority' (Ms White). Ms Olive observed that 'the pupils that…have had to change carers at the age of sixteen, things have gone drastically wrong for, very, very quickly'. Ms Lea referred to a 'flashpoint', when 'all of a sudden all our really good kids don't want to go to school anymore' and Ms Teal observed 'very often…Year 11 is destined to be a nightmare…it's awful, sometimes…December onwards…you sort of watch it unravel'. Professionals spoke of advocating for placement continuity post-sixteen, with Ms Ford stating:

> I fight very hard…I get really quite arsey… even if they became eighteen at the beginning of Year 13… it's now accepted I think that they will stay in that placement until they've finished their education, so 'til they leave school.

Niall's case provides a graphic example of the importance of continuity as young people transition from Key Stage 4 to 5. Although Ms Carmine did not consider Niall's carer to be adequate, she nonetheless considered that it would better for him to remain with her as he made the transition to college at sixteen, because 'he's been through so much, and is still lacking so much confidence, and he still needs so much support, that it would be best that he stays where he is until eighteen, definitely'. She had also endeavoured to arrange for him to continue at her school two days a week when he started college, saying:

> If he doesn't have it, everything that he's worked for in the last year, being here, is really going to be a waste of time, so I'm hoping that they will go for the two days, two mornings, something, that he's still got this connection, where his confidence is building up, he's a lot calmer, he's got a clear focus of where he wants to be, and he's experienced success… if that doesn't happen, yeah, I'll be definitely worried, with regards to his outlook. As of September…he won't last a term.

Unfortunately the local authority Special Educational Needs service declined to fund the ongoing provision at Ms Carmine's school and his carer lost her registration status. Niall was excluded from college early in the first term, disrupted further educational placements and remained NEET thereafter.

Disruption was particularly acute where young people were moved back into borough from out-of-borough placements at sixteen, for example where therapeutic residential care homes only cared for younger children (Mr Steel) or consequent upon resources issues (Ms Olive). Some participants described young people placed out of borough being told that if they did not achieve the GCSE grades required for sixth form entry, they would be relocated to their home borough to attend college, losing their carer, social worker, school and friends. Such pressure was likely to trigger 'all sorts of anxiety, all sorts of acting out, and all sorts of very challenging behaviour…' (Ms Teal).

5.5 **Evaluating young people's care**

Despite the deficiencies and weaknesses described above, all seventeen young people who took part in interviews in Year 12 were clear that entry into state care had been the right decision for them, with the notable exception of Imogen, who claimed not to understand why she had been removed from her mother's care and did not consider that it had been necessary for her welfare. Devora spoke candidly of the freedom she enjoyed living with her cousin (which she had been denied when caring for her father), and was grateful for the opportunities she had been given for engagement in social and performing arts activities through financial support from the local authority. Kayla described a 'family pattern' of bigotry and lack of ambition and motivation and was clear that care had provided her with 'a safe place' in which she had been able to raise her aspirations and learn to communicate and build relationships with others. Riley said care was the 'best thing that could have ever happened, personally', because 'it got me away from my mates, so I wasn't constantly messing about, getting in trouble with the police'. Tasmin thought that if she had not been taken into care she would 'probably be

one of them little hood rats that stand in the corner, their hood up, look really intimidating'. For a number of participants, it is likely that entry into care at an earlier age would have reduced the disadvantages they faced upon entry and enhanced their prospects as they approached adulthood. Riley felt he should have been removed from his parents at 'about ten' rather than fifteen, before he got too deeply into trouble.

Just over a third of the group appeared to have enjoyed stable and supportive placements (Adam, Bashir, Devora, Jacinda, Kayla, Michel, Ollie and Tasmin). Others had achieved a stable placement (such as Imogen) or support (e.g. Riley) but not both. At least thirteen of the cohort were or would be living independently at or shortly after they reached eighteen, an even higher proportion than the national figure of 37 per cent at nineteen (DfE/NS, 2013a). Only four young people (Jacinda, Kayla, Luis and Michael) seemed likely to 'stay put' in their foster placements after the age of eighteen. In terms of the social assets identified by Fineman (2008), most of the young people had experienced a dearth of supportive foster family relationships and this was not adequately compensated for by stable and positive relationships with social workers. Perhaps partly as a consequence, young people demonstrated a highly-developed sense of self-reliance.

There was also a wide range in the extent to which young people appeared to have been provided with opportunities to attain the central human capabilities Nussbaum designates 'Emotions' and 'Affiliation', such as

> [b]eing able to have attachments to things and people outside [them]selves; to love those who love and care for [them];…[n]ot having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety;…[b]eing able to live with and toward others…to engage in various forms of social interaction; [h]aving the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others'.

A significant number, notably Callum, Habib, Niall, Priya, Qadira and Unity, presented as particularly vulnerable in their ability to manage their behaviour and to engage with professionals. Analysis of young people's current life trajectories, using Stein's categories of care leavers based on their resilient adaptation to date, is undertaken in section 7.3.1, after consideration of their educational experiences and progress in the next chapter.

5.6 **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have described the complexity and instability of the young participants' personal lives before and after their entry into care and the developing sense of responsibility for their birth families as they approached legal adulthood. From this, it is apparent that young people faced significant concurrent challenges over the three years of the study, during which they also worked towards important educational qualifications. Consideration of the multiple transitions and personal issues facing young people in the light of Coleman's focal model of adolescence contributes to understanding of why looked-after children may feel overwhelmed by their circumstances and the potential effect on their educational progress. In the next chapter I explore the young people's educational experiences, before drawing again in Chapter 7 on the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 3 to re-evaluate the inter-relationship between young people's care and educational trajectories and the role of their corporate parent in supporting their educational transitions beyond Key Stage 4.

Chapter 6

Young people's educational experiences

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore the role of education in the lives of the young people participating in the study, in the context of their experiences in and before entering care, recounted in Chapter 5. I consider their educational experiences against an expectation that the state has both an equity-based responsibility to promote equality of opportunity and a reparatory responsibility to make amends for the harm suffered by young people in care and the disadvantage at which they have been placed as a result of their earlier life experiences. Drawing on themes from the data analysis which were articulated by young people and professionals as of particular significance or concern, I discuss young people's attitudes towards education and school. In the context of the political drive to narrow the attainment gap between groups of children regarded as vulnerable and their peers, I consider young people's perspectives on their attainment at GCSE and their educational trajectories through the course of the study in relation to the unique challenges faced by this cohort. In conclusion, I assess the extent to which their educational experiences in care appear to have enhanced young people's life chances, and the potential for Key Stage 5 to provide opportunities for young people to continue to 'catch up' with the educational progress of their peers.

6.2 The importance of education

Despite the difficulties in coping with the demands of school life outlined in the previous chapter, without exception the young people in the study acknowledged the importance of education, and particularly qualifications, for their future success. This is in keeping with studies such as that of Ball et al. (2000) in relation to young people more generally, but in contrast to the findings of Allen (2003), that care leavers came to value education and training late, through the bitter experience of the job market. Many of the participants to my study reported a sense of 'something to prove'. However, a core focus on educational attainment sometimes seemed relentless to young people and could result in a sense of failure and disillusionment. On the whole, previous concerns

apparent from the literature relating to looked-after children, of low expectations and prioritization of practical independence skills over longer-term career goals by professionals (Ofsted/SSI, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Hibbert, 2006; Jackson and Simon, 2006; Berridge, 2007), appeared to have been replaced by the same pressure to achieve reported to be experienced by this generation more generally (e.g. MindFull, 2013).

6.2.1 ***Valuing education***

The high priority accorded to their education by most of the young people in my study was reflected in the fact that the most common response given to questions about current priorities in their life related to their education, for example:

> *What would you describe as your key priorities in life now?*
> Focusing on college, and…focusing on college (Habib).

Even those young people not in education, employment or training recognized the value of education: Priya, for example, commented that education 'is a good thing'. Priya had entered care when pregnant at the age of thirteen and had experienced foster care and four care homes before obtaining her own accommodation. She had left school at sixteen and had dropped out of college after less than a term. Although she had applied for some apprenticeships and jobs, she had tended to fail to turn up for interviews or trial periods. Priya's ready acceptance of education as a social good is highlighted here because she provides a particularly poignant case study of a young person who falls into Stein's category of 'strugglers' (Stein, 2012). Despite an acute difficulty in engaging with professionals and others arising directly from her personal history, she demonstrated the will to engage in education and also expressed a clear appreciation of the importance of qualifications.

Unity had spent time in a secure children's home. Although she found the environment oppressive ('I hated being locked in, getting locked in your bedroom, you know what I mean? You can't go out nowhere, it's awful'), she appreciated the enforced education:

> it was a normal school structured day from nine till three, so you'd be doing the normal lessons you would be doing in school, so that was one of the best things I think about the secure unit, a really good school (Unity).

Participants were asked whether if they could go back in time they would change anything in relation to their education. Around half raised the kind of issues that would be common for this age-group, such as choice of subjects, but often the responses related to behaviour and focus in school, for example:

> I would have stopped bunking…in Year 10 I slapped a teacher, which I regret, got into loads of fights, bunked a lot of lessons (Callum).
>
> I wish I'd behaved a bit more and done my homework. Done the class work, and then I'd probably get higher than what I am now (Tasmin).
>
> Go back to school…and when I went to [PRU] I would not have messed around in school (Habib).

Five of the participants (Habib, Niall, Qadira, Riley and Unity) had been in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) in Year 11 and Luis was in a school for children with social, educational and behavioural difficulties. All six of these young people expressed the wish that they had focused and behaved better at school - or had been able to do so – or at least had managed to stay in school to make the most of their education. For example:

> *…would you do anything differently?*
> Yeah, of course, I'd go to school. Sometimes when I see kids in their uniform I'm like "oh I wish I could go back to school like that" (Quadira).
>
> *Is there anything you'd change*?
> My behaviour, and actually turn up on time, stay in school, listen, get my work done. Do all that (Riley).

Those with behavioural problems that had affected their education demonstrated insight into that loss and frustration over barriers to their access to education:

> when I was younger I done bad stuff, and I wasn't good at school, and I was losing my education for a bit of fun….when I'm older, and I'm leaving school, and I've got no education, it's not going to be funny then (Niall).
>
> probably try and stay in education as long as I can…Because I didn't do my GCSEs, because I was in a classroom that was non-GCSE because they didn't think I'd make it…Now this year [Year 12] I stayed on because I wanted to take them, and I did (Luis).

6.2.2 ***Staying in school***

Designated teachers identified the goal of advocating to keep looked-after children in school as a key aspect of their role. Although young people talked about attending school primarily as a means of obtaining qualifications, professional interviewees were alert to the pastoral value of school at times when disruption in other areas of a young person's life could be expected to spill over into school. Aside from academic considerations, designated teachers recognised that the primary role of the school in such circumstances often lies in offering security and continuity and a sense of normality to young people whose lives may otherwise be unpredictable and unsettled (Dixon et al., 2006). Keeping a young person with very challenging behaviour at school helped to take pressure off a placement under strain. Some were sceptical as to the extent to which the introduction of the designated teacher role could reasonably be expected to boost educational outcomes, regarding its main impact primarily in terms of preventing exclusion:

> successful in we keep students in school, we don't exclude them…but whether they are actually making that progress…I think…the progress is better than it was, because they are in school (Ms Teal).

> that's what it's all about, keeping them here at school, making sure they are getting an education (Ms White).

Looked-after children are, of course, a very diverse group (Rutter, 2000; Fletcher-Campbell, 2008). Some may not exhibit overt behavioural difficulties at school, notably many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, such as Bashir, and Devora, who became looked after following the death of both her parents. But for the most part, participants expected challenging behaviour from this cohort:

> *what have been the main issues…that have come up in relation to the looked-after role?*
> We have a lot of behavioural difficulties with some of the students, not [Gilroy] in particular, he's not too bad actually, but some of the others' behaviour is an issue (Ms White).

> I think managing behaviour probably. Managing their challenging behaviour. Maybe it's just been particular ones we've had (Ms Teal).

> it's mostly behaviour...two of our looked-after, they are very challenging anyway, it will be very challenging managing them…if there are changes in placements or any disruption in that routine, I think we see the big difference in school…and

> probably the biggest part of my role is managing that in school, and trying to make the school experience as good as possible, and not really disrupted, if possible (Ms Rose).

> …we've got a really good bunch, we've been very lucky, we haven't got any kids that are *tremendously* difficult to deal with (Mr Green).

> *Are there any particular priorities or challenges?*
> More on behavioural issues than anything else, if they don't like where they are placed they might cause some trouble (Ms Willow, Millbank College).

> …*Nature of contact with the virtual head, carers and so forth?*
> Predominantly when it comes to managing their behaviour process and if it's going down a disciplinary route (Ms Oak, Forest Hill College).

Designated teachers and virtual heads regarded the ability to advocate for young people as a key attribute of their role and both groups highlighted their work in ensuring appropriate school placement, monitoring attendance and preventing exclusions.

The seniority of the designated teacher within the school was an important factor in enabling them to 'fight' (Mr Black) on behalf of young people to avoid permanent exclusion and/or access services to support their reinstatement in school. A number of participants mentioned instances of young people who would have been excluded from school had it not been for their looked-after status, and the advocacy of the designated teacher on their behalf. Often this required a persuasive influence with head teachers: Mr Brown thought 'you've got to also have some powerful influence…I think the designated teacher should be as senior as possible really', a sentiment echoed by Mr Brook:

> [s]ometimes you wonder, with some of the designated teachers, are they struggling to find their voice in schools, in terms of their role?…but it's actually making sure really that designated teachers are appointed at that level of seniority, so they really have a voice, not just in supporting that particular child, but developing policy and strategy within the school.

Virtual heads also highlighted exclusion issues as central to their work, and particularly the need to ensure that schools understand that permanent exclusions should not be imposed on looked-after young people. They, too, would step in on behalf of individual pupils to dissuade a head-teacher from excluding them. Mostly they felt they were successful but there was some sense that the environment was hardening:

> schools understand that exclusion is not an issue, it's not something that's acceptable for our looked-after children (Ms Ford).
>
> I think the main achievement for me and my team has been around attendance, in particular exclusions, we didn't have any permanent exclusions for like three years… (Ms Lea).
>
> We have a lot of our work characterised by crisis management, in terms of trying to support schools…either to keep children in school, or working with them to manage the move of a child somewhere else, rather than being excluded, and we are very good at that, and actually that's one of our areas of success I'd say, but it's hugely time consuming, and…it's getting more difficult...all our schools, basically, have gone academy secondaries, pretty well now…lots of things that are happening at the moment will probably lead to exclusions becoming worse (Ms Mason).
>
> We have nine secondary schools in the borough, they are all quite large, and eight are very good on this, and one is less good, and therefore we are working with the one that is less good at the moment, but we have too many looked-after children in the PRU, and they are sometimes our children who have been excluded outside the borough, and they come back to us (Mr Steel).
>
> We are going to compose a letter to remind heads, because I think they've forgotten that…before they contemplate excluding a student they need to contact the local authority first to make sure there's alternative provision in place, and… it should be first day provision…some of our young people are being excluded, and there isn't any provision for them, and we are not being told…we are pretty good at avoiding permanent exclusions, I mean sometimes we arrange a managed move to avoid a permanent exclusion (Mr Brook).

The fact that six of the young people in the study (Habib, Luis, Niall, Qadira, Riley and Unity) had been permanently excluded from school appears to support the view that not all schools are as sympathetic as they might be towards supporting looked-after children to stay in mainstream schools. So, too, does Ms Olive's observation that, although at the time of the interview eight of the eighteen young people in her school lived with their birth parents or extended family, in some years her entire school population was looked after. Luis' account of his path to exclusion highlights the importance of good communication with young people. He had been in the 'unit' within his school, but was moved back into mainstream classes because he was doing well. He was unhappy, though, because his friends were in the unit, and in the mainstream classes 'they were all bullies and that and they knew what to do to annoy

me'. So he 'decided to play up' to get back in the unit, but his strategy backfired and he was excluded instead.

Ms Ford highlighted the need for education and social care to work together to ascertain the best educational placement for a young person, recounting her experience of a young woman who had suffered sexual abuse over a number of years:

> her behaviour at school became really, really, challenging, and she had lots of short term exclusions, and…she is now in a specialist residential school, and I went to see her two weeks ago, she is just a different person. So obviously a mainstream school placement wasn't the place for her, her needs are so extreme, and she is getting one-to-one tuition nearly all of the time…I think when it gets to the stage where exclusion is almost the last resort for the school…that social care needs to find a different placement.

For some young people, good quality alternative provision *could* be a lifeline. A smaller, more relaxed and supportive environment with greater personal attention from staff could provide a chance to develop basic social and academic skills and gain confidence (see Poyser (2013) for a discussion of inclusion policy for looked-after children). That was briefly the case for Niall, who flourished in a small independent school for excluded young people in Year 11. However, as described in Chapter 5, in Year 12 Niall was denied the ongoing pastoral support from the school which the head had recommended for him in college. He was subsequently excluded from two colleges and was unemployed and described as 'gang-affiliated' by his social worker in Year 13.

Others, such as Luis, were concerned as to the limited curriculum and access to qualifications in alternative provision. Habib was seriously let down by the alternative education provided for him after he was excluded for possession of drugs at school. Although he had some access to college, he was only preparing for GCSEs in (he thought) Maths and English. He was hesitant to criticise the provision when interviewed there in Year 11, but looking back in Year 13, he concluded '[t]hat place was shit'. He was frustrated with the curriculum on offer and with the lack of structure and discipline:

> I just want to study something that I'm going to be doing GCSEs in…I wish I was still in school….it's too laid back, they are too soft…some of my teachers don't even really come in…see now, what time is it?…

> *It's gone twelve o'clock*
> Yeah, some students are coming now, they are meant to come at nine o'clock…some teachers will wait for them. And it's hard on my education, they do that and stuff. So it's taking the piss really (Habib: Year 11).

Once excluded from mainstream provision during Key Stage 4, it was not easy to return. Ms Coral remarked that

> if they got excluded in Year 10, and then they were meant to come to us for a twelve week programme, by the time you've done that…to put them back into a new mainstream school, having missed most of the coursework, you are setting them up to fail. And schools won't take them towards the end of Year 10 or the beginning of Year 11, so they end up staying with us for Key Stage 4.

Ms Carmine also felt that out of sight was out of mind for many schools:

> But normally what happens is once they are here they are here, basically, the school kind of takes a back view. Not all schools, I do have one or two schools that do come up and see me every week, and still interested in their students, and then some just don't, I have to be prompting them to come and visit, come and look at the work, come and look at the progress.

6.2.3 ***Determination to do well***

Despite his dissatisfaction with the provision, Luis persevered at his small school for young people with social, educational and behavioural difficulties to get some qualifications in Year 12 and he progressed to college in Year 13. Habib progressed to college in Year 12, although he had to study a subject he was not really interested in, and was persisting in Year 13, having started again at level 1 in a new college with a new course. Such determination was characteristic of many of the young people in the study and those who were settled in school were proactive in seeking help to ensure that they had the best chance of attaining their goals, including through requesting one-to-one tuition:

> I have a French and maths tutor…Because I was not failing, but I wasn't doing as well in French, and I just wanted to boost my maths grade up…I asked the school and my social worker (Kayla);

and through taking advantage of the Looked After Child Review process to raise concerns:

> …my science teacher - I'm not really learning much from him, so I complained, but hopefully they are sorting it out now….Yeah, I said it out loud to my Head of Year so that she knows. And then [Miss Gold], she went and talked to my science teacher and then called my [foster] mum and hopefully it was sorted out (Jacinda).

Ms Ford, whose virtual school team attended all PEP meetings in schools to get to know the children personally, confirmed that 'certainly the older ones, are quite happy to ask for help, and accept help'.

Bashir conformed closely to the familiar stereotype of the unaccompanied asylum-seeking child (UASC) for whom education is a high priority (Jackson et al., 2005; Brownlees and Finch, 2010; Jackson and Cameron, 2012). Having arrived unaccompanied in the UK from Afghanistan in 2007 with little prior education and minimal English, he was predicted four A*s in his A2s. He was extremely demanding both of himself and his school, demonstrating an insatiable appetite for study: 'I always think of myself "I have to know that", or if there's a topic I wasn't sure I go home research it all the time'. He never felt he was receiving as much support as he would like and sought more one-to-one tuition:

> The teachers are helpful, a lot, but I think I am needing extra help from them, but they can't always provide it, because they have to give their support to everyone, which is not possible…that's why I want more support, one-to-one, because when I had it last year I could tackle any problems I had.

He was successful in accessing more tuition in Year 11 but was not wholly satisfied with his GCSE results:

> … now I realise I could have done even better, … I should have got all A*s…I could have done better in my English language, I got a B, that's the only B I had, by the way…
>
> *You don't think you are being a bit hard on yourself?*
> I feel like I could have done better, yeah, because…Say you get an A or something you can even do better again by getting a hundred percent, that's what I always wanted to do, be the best…always aim for the top…all the time I want to do the best.

In Year 12 Bashir requested and was given a laptop, explaining:

> … my social worker organised, I told her when I was sixteen I told her I need a laptop, because there's only one computer [at the foster home], and there's like three, four people, using it. Sometimes they have homeworks, and then I have to wait for them, and sit an hour, two hours sometimes…I get lots of work, lots of homework…and also because I do lots of research, because it's very difficult sometimes I read ahead of the class, and that way I need to do some research and find out more.

Adam too put all his energies into his school work:

> it was Year 10 when I picked up, end of Year 10. And Year 11 I come back, I just thought "here I go, I'm going to take this" and everything, Eminem in my music, and I just done what I've got to do. Just worked hard…Now I'm happy, I think I'm one of the highest achievers the school's ever had in foster care.

A number of participants had curtailed their hobbies and social life to focus on their studies during the course of the project, including Tasmin, who said 'recently I haven't been doing anything because I've got a lot of homework'.

Despite evincing high levels of motivation, many young participants felt that stigma still clung to them and/or that they had 'something to prove' to themselves or others. For Kayla and Adam, this related to breaking away from the cycle of failure they saw in their birth families. Kayla said 'I think I'm the only one in my family …who's gone this far in education…. it's like I'm kind of making my own way instead of following other family traits instead'. Adam explained:

> I wanna go somewhere in life.
>
> *What do you think's made you feel like that?*
> Well, looking at my…real family, I can see they ain't gone far in life, that's why they've got into these stupid situations. So basically I want to show other people that a boy who has basically lost four years of his education, I want to prove to people that there's no reason why you cannot go far in life, and there's no reason why you cannot get good grades.

6.2.4 ***Educational support and pressure***

In comparison to earlier research findings that professionals and carers did not prioritise looked-after children's education (Ofsted/SSI, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Hibbert, 2006; Jackson and Simon, 2006; Berridge, 2007) the young people in this study generally felt that the adults in their lives placed a high value on educational attainment.

Carers were reported as regarding fostering educational achievement as central to their role and there was some evidence of good communication between school and home:

> *Does she [foster carer] think your education's important?*
> Very. The other day this lady asked me to go to modelling school, and she took my details and everything, and my mum was saying that she doesn't want me to do it yet, and she wants me to focus on my education … (Jacinda).

> *Do you find it easy to settle down to homework?*
> No, it's stressful…
> *Does anybody make sure it's done?*
> Yeah, my foster mum, she always helps me with it, and if there are any mistakes she will help me improve it…The feeling when you get home, and you have to do your homework, like you can't go out with your mates, you have to stay home and do your homework (Gilroy).

> Sometimes I just tell her I've done it and I haven't…but…she knows because school tells her when I don't do homework…

> *Is that a good thing or a bad..?*
> Yeah, because I wouldn't do it (Tasmin).

Often the young people were very appreciative of foster carers who actively enforced discipline in their studying; strict rules in Year 11 could translate into self-discipline in the sixth form:

> …sometimes I get bored so I just…you know, leave it…Well, if I have homework, usually when I go home, it's like you have to finish your homework before you do anything else, so I manage to do it (Kayla, Year 11);

> I don't really do much outdoor activities at the moment, just because I have nine weeks left and I just want to finish my course, so I occasionally go and see my family, stay at home, or see my friends. I don't really go out in the weekdays, I go out on the weekends…don't have time to go out so much now. But you never know; I could have one break in the day (Kayla, Year 13).

Where relationships with foster carers were strong, the family's work ethic could be highly influential on young people in the way that might be expected within birth families:

> *Do you have a particular role model in life…?*

> I would say my mum, foster mum…Because she works so hard…she's at uni, she's pushing herself to get better and stuff, and I think that's really good, and it's pushing me to do more as well (Jacinda).

> …even my foster carer's sons, she's got two of them, and the younger one always like gives me lectures too… just giving me lectures to make sure that I'm doing my work.

> *And do you mind that?*
> No, because otherwise I probably wouldn't do it, probably get bored (Tasmin).

Professionals, however, reported a more mixed picture in relation to the expertise and engagement of foster carers in educational matters. Mr Steel thought that although carers were more involved in young people's education than they used to be, 'their own education is still very limited…We can get carers…much more readily…but having carers who are educated beyond a certain level is quite challenging'. Ms Ford said:

> We've got some very highly educated ones, but we've also got some for whom I would say that they have no personal experience of higher education, either themselves or other members of their close family, so a foster child would be completely new…the virtual school trains foster carers to help them understand the educational issues and a lot of them find it very difficult to understand what levels of attainment are like, and what they should be expecting, and just discussing ways that they can support the children at home.

She had worked to build up a relationship with foster carers, and added 'they would ask for help, I'm pretty sure they would.'

Ms Olive described a 'strong ethos' in both foster homes and residential homes, but Ms Coral's observation that children placed in foster care were more likely to be supported in their education regrettably reflects the consistent findings of research (Berridge, 1985; Jackson, 1987; Berridge and Brodie, 1998; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007). She also commented that the birth parents of most looked-after children she had encountered had 'a limited understanding and interest in education, so often the foster parents were actually a lot more engaged'. Ms Olive, too, reflected that there may be low literacy levels among family members and very often school had not been a 'good place' for birth parents. Some of her looked-after children remained at home and The Grove tried to change their family's perceptions of school.

Foster carers were not always readily engaged, however. Ms Carmine had had to put pressure on Niall's carer to take more responsibility for his education:

> I had to put my foot down and say "listen, you are his carer at the end of the day, you've got to be involved in what we are doing here", so got the social worker to put on a bit of pressure as well, and now it's working as it should.

For some young people, the focus on education by carers and social workers as well as teachers could become overwhelming or maddening:

> *Is there anything you'd like to say about [being in care]?*
> There are loving people, and they try for your best…but…basically, social workers and key workers, and all of that, they just all they've got is just education, education (Qadira).

> Sometimes they are just annoying…Because every time they talk about the same stuff, you know, it's getting crazy. I swear. It's too much. Seriously. Every time my social worker sees me. Just about school, school, I say really, you don't have anything to talk about? Yeah, it's like "oh no, that's important, that's your future". I said "I know that already, just I'm tired…you and…my foster carer, talk about the same stuff every day". I had enough in school, and when I come home the same stuff, it's every day (Sofia Year 11).

> …like she sits there telling me any level I get's not good enough, and it has to be an A*…I got a B in like English once, and I was like one mark off an A, and she sat there saying it wasn't good enough, and I should be on an A*, and I was like "you are not in any right to say I should be on an A*, you are a social worker". I was like "you didn't really do anything good with your life", and shut her up. Because she said that like being a midwife wasn't a good job, she kind of put me off being a midwife (Tasmin).

> Most meetings all they think about is my education, and they want me to work and do things…I do get annoyed sometimes, that I'm having too much meetings and things like that, because at my age I shouldn't be having meetings, meetings to do with my life, so I do get stressed about it sometimes (Gilroy).

While Kayla and Adam put pressure on themselves to prove they could overcome the family stereotype, Tasmin's extended birth family were determined that she should 'succeed':

> Every time I speak to my aunt I get a lecture about staying in school. And my nan's like "you need to be the first one to do your GCSEs" and I'm "OK", it's like she thinks that none of my family has GCSEs (Tasmin).

> I get a lecture from my sister every time I go there, about not messing up my life like she did, and making sure I stay in school, and every week she'll test me on what I've learnt, she'll take my books out of my bag and start testing me (Tasmin).

6.3 **'Raising aspirations' and conceptualising 'success'**

6.3.1 ***Aspiration and attainment***

To counter the longstanding criticism that professionals were not raising their sights high enough for children in state care referred to earlier, statutory guidance (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009: paragraph 3.2) requires designated teachers to ensure 'high expectations of looked after children's involvement in learning and educational progress'. As Mr Steel pointed out, raising aspirations in children from families with no background of university education requires working with young people from the start of secondary school, which is often not possible for late entrants into care. However, from the evidence of this modest study, this is a message that seems now to be communicated clearly to looked-after young people. Ms Lea said her virtual school had 'lots of kids at uni' and Ms Ford reported that three of the eleven children in Year 12 of Wadebridge's virtual school would be 'looking to go' to university and one young woman had started at university in the preceding September, adding:

> bear in mind that some of them are LDD [learning difficulties and disabilities] children, and some of them are asylum-seekers, so they are still developing their English…And…there is the bipolar girl who wouldn't cope with college.

Mr Steel was concerned to ensure that high-achieving young people were given the right advice and support and described his intervention with one young man:

> I pulled him in here at the start of his A level courses, because I wanted to make sure he was doing appropriate courses, and I wanted to talk through his Year 11 results…I wanted to gauge how hard he'd worked, and what the capacity was to improve, and…a good view on how he was likely to do. I go into that school…and I ask questions about how he is doing and things…as a virtual head teacher you get these offers from higher education institutions, so I will pass those on to the designated teacher and say right, can you follow those up.

Most of the young participants were actively considering going to university and spontaneously referred to their expectation of progression to higher education in interviews:

> *Do you think it's a good idea that young people should have to stay in education until they are eighteen…?*
> I think it's a good idea…like you'd waste your education if you don't go to college, because at the moment you are getting your education so you can get somewhere in future, so you can go to college, and on to university, but then if you don't go to any of them it would be a waste of it all (Farouk).

Looked-after children have preferential admissions status to the school of their choice, so some were in high-achieving schools where university entrance was the norm. Higher education has expanded significantly in recent years, so to an extent this may be a reflection of the expectations of their generation, or, in the case of UASC, of their family background:

> *what about your friends…Do you talk to them much about…future careers and things?*
> Yeah, me and my friend was talking about university the other day, like what were good ones, and talking about the one we visited. Yeah. Talking a lot about that (Tasmin).

> *And you'll try to go to college after that, when you are eighteen?*
> I want to be in school and have a good mark for stay at school…and go straight off to uni (Sofia, who had arrived in the UK eight months prior to the interview).

Designated teachers in mainstream schools were at pains to point out that the setting of academic targets and tracking of performance against those targets was something that is undertaken for all children, particularly in Year 11. They saw this aspect of their role not in terms of singling out looked-after children but rather as including them fully in a process established as good practice. Ms Gold explained 'we do an awful lot of monitoring and tracking and setting targets, and it is done in line with the school community'. Mr Black stated that encouraging high aspirations was

> part of my role, because it's part of my role for all our students… I know what these children should be capable of, and I set, we set, ambitious targets above that…[for] all our students, so these students should be no different, and will be no different.

For Ms Rose, this was an important principle of inclusion:

> it's something we do as a school, is high expectations of all of them…from everyone on SEN register to everyone in the school.

Ms Gold expressed some disquiet that it was felt necessary to include a duty to encourage high expectations of looked-after children in the statutory guidance, because it was something she considered should be embedded in the school ethos for all pupils:

> It bothers me that it's put like that, as if you have never done it. If we are in schools and we are educating young people, it's our duty to everybody, whatever their category. It's the same for our children in care, it's the same for our children who are on the special needs register, it's the same for our high flyers...I see it as…the usual thing to do when you are in education.

At Woodhall, Mr Brown explained

> we have lots of different categories of kids who are not performing. So LACs are just one of that...But you deal with all the different categories of underachievement.

'Dealing with underachievement' involved a variety of strategies. At Clifton, vulnerable children, particularly those in Year 11, were offered mentoring, and Ms White set weekly targets for the looked-after children, in the form of coursework or re-sitting an exam to improve a grade, or attendance at revision courses. Gilroy, however, did not appreciate the mentoring provided – in common with other participants his focus was on qualifications:

> it's just a lesson where you get to talk and think…they talked to you, what you could do to improve your grades and things.
>
> *And do you think that's helpful?*
> A bit, but I'd rather be in lessons, learning (Gilroy).

Mr Black described his role in relation to a looked-after young man who was not meeting his target grades:

> I've really sat down with the Head of Year and said "look at the report, look at the target grades, look at how he's doing, and it's not good, what are we going to do about that?" We've met with the mother, we've met with the social worker and we are trying to put together a plan, and things have improved recently…

But he went on to acknowledge:

> [even] if we can monitor him, and keep him under control, he may not get five A*s to C including English and maths.

The concept of 'monitoring' was fundamental to the way in which virtual heads saw their role, which focused heavily on tracking educational attainment:

> it is about attainment and levels and what the schools are saying and the PEP targets and education targets and the emphasis is about attainment, and outcomes, quite frankly (Ms Lea).

> Three times a year, we collect data on the educational levels of achievement of all our children, and so we are able to challenge if we think progress is not in place (Ms Ford).

> We meet on a half-termly basis, we look at outcomes across the piece, and we discuss the progress…we go to social work teams and we've been training them for the last year, so that social workers can hold schools to account much better (Mr Steel).

Although social workers were focused on educational outcomes, virtual heads acknowledged that understanding educational processes was often challenging for them: 'I wasn't sure how much they understood of the possibilities post-sixteen…and also educational qualifications' (Mr Steel). This reflects the findings of Ofsted (2012a) that social workers' understanding of educational issues is an area requiring further attention. The virtual schools trained and supported social workers to 'hold schools to account much better' (Mr Steel) and in 'challenging the school, and making sure these are stretched and appropriate targets' (Ms Lea). However, young people did not always feel their social workers were able to give them educational advice:

> Educational-wise I don't get any support from my social worker…She does talk about how my school is going and everything, she does ask, for example, which university you want to go to, I tell her that, but I don't get help in education (Bashir).

> I don't think they know much because … she said I'm gonna be probably the second person that will be going to uni she knows (Bashir).

> *Do you think she understands about your education?*
> No. Not really (Niall).

> *Is she interested in education, do you think?*

Don't know about that…but I don't think she knows what she's doing (Niall).

The language of 'monitoring', 'dealing with underachievement' and 'attainment' highlights the principal focus of schools on educational achievement, notwithstanding designated teachers' sensitivity to pastoral concerns arising amongst looked-after children. The remainder of this section considers the data from this study in the context of the tension in the literature between Berridge et al.'s suggestion that 'low achievement' is a more appropriate term than 'underachievement' for this cohort (Berridge et al., 2008) and the concerns of others such as Jackson that children's abilities have too often gone unrecognised or unfulfilled (Bentley, 2013; Jackson, 2013a).

6.3.2 ***High expectations and/or low achievement***

The study provides evidence of a significant shift in professional attitudes. Ms Lea referred to measuring the attainment of looked-after children against an expectation that 'they have to be the same as everyone else': 'it's the Holy Grail isn't it, closing the gap'. Ms Mason said that 'strategic priority number one is to raise attainment' and Mr Brook observed that 'the priority is always trying to raise achievement of young people'. In contrast, 'ten years ago…it was "can they be in school?"' (Ms Lea). Designated teachers were described as 'committed to try and get the best out of their children' (Mr Brook). Ms Olive stressed the importance of 'really high aspirations - "this is what you can achieve with your life"' for children who had always been told they were worthless. It appears that such attitudes are not, however, universal. Ofsted (2012a) found that virtual heads felt that some schools were still not demonstrating high expectations for looked-after children and in this study Ms Carmine commented: 'I think they kind of used here as a holding space…rather than [Niall] becoming someone, and achieving, and being successful'.

While it is clear that the highest educational aspirations are appropriate for some of this very diverse group, such as Bashir (and see Bentley, 2013), for some other young people in the study, the promotion of 'high' expectations, where these were narrowly defined by access to university or entry to high-status professions, was more problematic. In some cases young people appeared to be encouraged to aim for university entrance even though it did not seem to be an appropriate route for them, either because they were unlikely to achieve the necessary qualifications, or because university was not a

helpful step on the way to achieving their career goals. Jacinda's foster carer, with whom she had an excellent relationship, had done her utmost to encourage her to take a traditional academic pathway and Jacinda had done her best to comply – despite not knowing quite why university was a good idea. In Year 11 she told me 'I do want to go to university, but I don't know why I want to go on to university'. By Year 12, she had changed her mind, explaining 'I keep saying I don't want to go to uni, because I'm kind of scared in a way…if I can't cope with A levels then I definitely won't be able to cope with uni'. In Year 13, Jacinda was much happier and more confident, having left school for college at the end of Year 12. She regretted the wasted year at school, but still intended to go to university and held no grudge against her carer:

> she thought it would be good like, for a child in care to have done A levels, but when I changed my course she understood, and she was like well as long as I go to uni and do well.

Adam's school arranged for him to go to an Open Day at Cambridge University in Year 12. He was thinking of studying Philosophy, Politics and Economics, although he had not achieved a C in GCSE Maths in Year 11. Mr Green acknowledged that he would have to be 'let down gently', as although he was very hard working, Adam was not that academic. By Year 13, Adam had reverted to his Year 11 plans to go into construction. He had offers from three universities, but felt no 'good' ones offered construction and there was less work experience available in a degree course than if he obtained an apprenticeship. Unfortunately, apprenticeships were extremely competitive and there were few opportunities left, because his focus on university entrance had delayed his consideration of alternative pathways. Gilroy confided a desire to attend university and study Sports Science only after the recorder had been switched off, which may have been indicative of his awareness that his ambition was unrealistic at that point, or perhaps it reflected a fear or previous experience of ridicule. At that stage of his life, Gilroy was living semi-independently after an incident in his foster placement and he had dropped out of a level 2 Sports BTEC qualification at college, where his behaviour had been deliberately challenging. He was awaiting an appointment to join a local authority initiative with a local professional football team aimed at providing life skills and sport to care leavers at risk of becoming NEET.

Michael offered the only apparent instance of a less academically-oriented young person being steered gently in an appropriate direction at an early stage. After his designated

teacher, Ms Teal, had spoken to him about his career plans in Year 10, he revised his goal. 'Originally I wanted to be a zoologist', he explained, 'but I changed my mind and want to be a zoo keeper, because I want to have more interaction with the animals'.

Professionals shared similar views as to the interdependence of students' educational attainment and pastoral well-being: in Mr Black's words: 'it is very, very difficult to compensate and deal with the emotional turmoil that these children are going through'. However there were some differences of opinion as to the effect of promoting high-status aspirations among vulnerable cohorts through the somewhat aggressive mechanisms of target-setting and monitoring. Some participants acknowledged that the focus on meeting targets might be a considerable source of stress for some young people: 'they should be meeting minimum target grades, all students should, and that's really hard, so the pressure is on those students' (Ms White). Both Ms White and Ms Teal held responsibility for looked-after students in Year 11 who had experienced a recent placement move or breakdown and were attuned to the likely effect that would have on GCSE performance. Ms Teal said of a student at Meadowpond:

> he's able and bright, and his predicted grades up until a couple of weeks ago were five A-Cs. He's got a good chance of getting five A-Cs, probably more than five, but with the placement breaking down I'm not sure now.

Similarly, a young woman at Clifton was not expected to get the GCSE grades she was capable of:

> We have one student who... is bright enough to be able to get a B… in some areas, but I suppose she's not very switched on... because of everything, I think, that's happened. She's moved foster placements quite a lot, this is her second secondary school, she started in Year 9, and her placement's just moved recently, and it's just really difficult, because the last priority, really, is her grades. (Ms White).

While participants such as Adam and Jacinda readily accepted being steered into the most academic qualifications that they might realistically achieve, for others, there was a mismatch between their own ambitions and the expectations of professionals. In some cases, this difference served to highlight the extent to which young people's individual aspirations were communicated to or understood by designated teachers. Mr Black said of Devora: 'she's highly academic, we need to make sure, and she will, that she goes the usual path, A levels, university degree, off into the world of work'. However, Devora

herself was clear that she wished to study Performing Arts at college, with a view to a career in drama, singing and dancing and that this had been a long-term ambition.

How and why the prevailing association of university entrance with success has arisen is unclear from this study and beyond its scope: it reflects a wider privileging of formal academic qualifications over vocational skills in the UK compared with other countries (Wolf, 2011; Baker, 2014). Possibilities include pressures on local authorities to demonstrate improved levels of entry to higher education by looked-after children; traditional middle-class values held by teaching staff; assumptions as to the employment prospects for graduates (International Labour Office (ILO), 2012); and the lack of availability of good vocational training options (Wolf, 2011; Winch, 2012; Foley, 2014). It is important, however, that professionals do not succumb to the pressure of performance targets by failing to respect young people's own interests and aspirations. Broader and more individual understandings of what constitutes 'success' may serve some looked-after young people better, but it is also crucial that looked-after young people's attainment at sixteen is not assumed to represent their academic capabilities. The remainder of this chapter sets out the young participants' attainment at Key Stage 4 and their educational choices and trajectories thereafter before considering the extent to which young people were encouraged and enabled to continue to enhance their educational attainment post-sixteen.

6.4 **Attainment at Key Stage 4 and choices post 16**

6.4.1 ***Attainment at Key Stage 4***

Table 6.1 shows the young people's attainment at Key Stage 4 and their destinations thereafter. From the table it can be seen that of the nineteen young people whose KS4 qualifications are known, only four attained 5A*-Cs at GCSE in Year 11 including maths and English, but at least a further three, Adam, Imogen and Kayla, did so through sitting retakes in Year 12. The following sections address how successfully young people were able to progress in Years 12-13.

Table 6.1: Attainment at Key Stage 4

5 A*-C including maths & English in Year 11	**Year 11 qualifications**	**School/college in Year 12**
Bashir	4 A*s, 8 As, 1 B (English)	School
Devora	2 As, 7 Bs, 1 C, 1 pass, 1 D	College (Performing Arts)
Jacinda	2Bs; 4Cs (2 English, maths, Science); 1 Merit; 1D, 1E	School then repeated Year 12 in College
Tasmin	Media, sociology, business, history, core subjects	School
5 A*-C including maths & English in Year 12		
Adam	6/7 A*s at GCSE, Maths resit	School
Imogen	2 Ds, 3 Es, 2 Fs, 1G	College (Child care)
Kayla	Ds in English and maths	School
Sofia?	Took maths, English, Science, Dance GCSEs	College
Did not achieve 5 A*-C		
Callum	'a couple of passes.'	School
Farouk	'Most everything Ds'	College (immigration exclusion)
Gilroy	[grades not stated]	College (excluded for behavior)
Habib	Limited GCSE courses at PRU, qualifications unclear	College (level 1)
Luis	No qualifications Year 11, expecting Ds/Es Year 12	Repeated Year 11 in SEBD special school then College
Niall	Functional skills & 2 GCSEs in Year 11	College (excluded)
Ollie	None	Will be dependent throughout life
Priya	Unclear if no quals or some BTECs	College (dropped out)
Qadira	NVQ level 1 in hair & literacy	Neither – left school Year 10
Riley	Ds, Es and Fs	College (dropped out)
Unity	Limited secondary attend'ce	College (dropped out)
Qual status unclear		
Elliott	Coursework 'mostly Bs & Cs'	College (dropped out first term)
Michael	Qualifications unknown	School

6.4.2 ***School or College***

The inherent difficulties for schools in reconciling the need to 'make allowances' and provide strong and consistent pastoral support for this cohort with the focus on academic attainment, appeared to become most acute when considering the transition at the end of compulsory school, when young people are sixteen. The professional participants generally considered that remaining at school had significant advantages for these children in terms of continuity of relationships, a sense of security and ongoing support. Ms Ford stated 'I would definitely prefer to have them in schools' and Ms Lea explained 'there's more established support in school'. Mr Brown stressed the enormity of the sixteen plus transition for looked-after children:

> the last thing we want, and you've got to rein some teachers back from this…is them to leave. They are much better staying with us…Because we all know that transitions are awful, and that transition, from sixteen to seventeen is terrifying, and if they can stay with us they've got some sort of stability.

He thought that at college

> you'll just be anonymous, no-one will know you…they won't…particularly care about you, but in school we know you, you've got people who have built a very strong relationship with you, and they will look out for you and make sure things go well.

Ms White said 'particularly if it's a vulnerable student we will do our best to keep them here if that's what they want', while Ms Gold reflected on Imogen as follows:

> I think she'd be more successful here…There's something quite comfortable about the [Queen's] environment for the girls….I think she might get lost a little bit [at college]…she had talked about childcare…that's a vocational course that we offer here, so she could remain with us, which is where I think she feels safe… Because I think she is not so brave…

Ms White related concerns about Gilroy:

> he's not as confident, and he interprets things differently to other students, the maturity isn't quite there yet… So I would worry about him leaving… So we will get him to apply to the sixth form, probably as a back-up plan, anyway, so that he can come back and be in a safe environment.

There were two factors which might stand in the way of young people remaining in school, however. First, while some, such as Callum, were apprehensive about leaving school ('I know everybody here, I know all the teachers, and, you know, I didn't want to go to college where I knew nobody'), others were attracted by a new start and greater independence, or struggled to conform in school:

> maybe they've had enough of that school, and the experiences, and everybody just wants them out of the door, they've done their exams now, thank God…you need a fresh start, it would be better for you to go to college (Ms Lea).

Ms Teal described 'leaning on' her head teacher to fund a college place for a girl in Year 11:

> If she'd have stayed here she'd have been a permanent exclusion, because she was only fifteen going on eighteen. She really didn't fit in school anymore...She won student of the year at college.

Second, schools were often unable to offer suitable curricula. While there were admissions criteria for progressing to 'A' levels in the sixth form, all of the schools appeared to have some form of vocational courses on offer. However, these were relatively limited compared with the provision available at further education colleges, and often did not provide the same range of practical experience. Woodhall probably offered the widest variety of vocational courses, but Mr Brown explained: 'We have really good vocational provision, but we just cannot do some of the specialised vocational stuff', and Mr Green said: '[w]e like them to stay…but we've got a woefully bad level 2 offer'.

Some schools were very creative in attempting to give their looked-after children the best of both worlds. Ms Gold, for example, had supplemented a childcare course in school for one young woman with additional input from a college, to fill up her timetable and because she was not handling school very well. Such compromises allowed young people more freedom and access to more suitable programmes of study, whilst still enabling them to keep the continuity, familiarity and support on offer from school. Similarly, Ms Teal could arrange for joint attendance at Meadowpond and the adjacent special school, which offered some level 1 opportunities. She explained:

> we are quite small, and we are quite able to make exceptions… and they would be made for a statemented kid, and they probably would be made for a looked-after child as well…if we thought that the placement was good, and the child couldn't make the transition easily, and he was going to be very upset and anxious about it, we'd do all we could to keep him here, and to find a curriculum in the sixth form for him or her.

An ironic consequence of looked-after children having preferential admissions status is that high-performing schools are likely to have fewer vocational opportunities at Key Stage 5. A number of designated teachers expressed concern that it would not be fair to keep students in the sixth form if they were not sufficiently academically able or prepared: 'if they haven't coped with GCSE we don't want to put them into a course they are not going to survive' (Ms White); 'we love our girls to stay with us into the sixth form…it's important though that students don't take on an AS/A2 course without having the grounding, because actually that wouldn't be kind' (Ms Gold). Ms Ford concluded 'if they want to do vocational based courses, which quite a few of them do, then we have to look at college provision'.

Where young people's grades were not good enough to remain at school or to access their preferred college courses, there was generally provision at those colleges to start at a lower level: 'they'll just have to maybe go in at an NVQ level lower, sort of start a level 1 instead of level 2, where they probably should be' (Ms White). Yet previous research (Driscoll, 2011) points to the potential drawbacks in terms of loss of motivation and purpose when young people who have underperformed are forced to continue at a lower level of qualification than is commensurate with their ability. There are no universal requirements for looked-after students to be given priority in admissions arrangements at colleges, although this was something a virtual head had raised with Ms Maple at Millbank College. The following sections consider the arrangements for transition to college and support for looked-after children attending further education colleges.

6.4.3 ***Transition to college***

Notwithstanding references in the statutory guidance (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) to the role of designated teachers in helping young people make a smooth transition to college, liaison between schools and further education (FE) colleges appeared surprisingly limited. For some schools, contact with further education

colleges of any kind seemed to be quite a recent development. Accordingly, there was little or no concrete knowledge of what support might be made available for looked-after students and although the introduction of the 16-19 bursary has prompted payment of greater attention to this group in further education colleges, the support available appears to be patchy and the mechanisms through which it is delivered varied. Colleges were seen to be to a certain extent in competition with school sixth forms, and there was perhaps at times a measure of mistrust of the further education estate. Colleges also varied as to the contacts they made available to schools: one, for example, communicated through their marketing department rather than allowing ready access to tutors. Ms Coral thought 'it would be good to meet with the college…but that's never happened', while Mr Green had tried on numerous occasions to talk to the college Elliott had attended on his behalf, but they had never responded to his communications.

For the most part designated teachers appeared to regard the role of liaison with colleges as within the remit of the leaving care team, and schools did little more than send the student's academic record and references on request, while Ms Willow at Millbank College observed that the college worked well with social care but found it difficult to get information from feeder schools. Some schools undertook transition planning work with their looked-after children: Meadowpond, for example, employed teaching assistants to take young people to visit or undertake sessions at the local college after GCSEs and Connexions would also be involved, but with the move to the leaving care team, the school would become less involved. This was likely to be particularly the case when the young person was looked after by a different local authority than that to which the school belonged, and the local authority were seeking further education provision closer to home.

These are areas in which there is significant potential for virtual schools to facilitate smooth transition arrangements for young people, and where necessary advocate on behalf of young people, but virtual heads currently report varied practice. Mr Brook, whose virtual school extended beyond eighteen, considered that the authority had good contacts with local colleges, but in the other local authorities the transition was more problematic. Mr Steel had recently started to focus more on post-sixteen work, as the virtual school was being extended to eighteen, but in the other two authorities post-sixteen education was the responsibility of a different team. Of those, Ms Lea felt that

there was good communication between the two teams, but Ms Mason commented that one of the local authority's priorities was 'a better system for continuity between school age children and sixteen-plus', because 'when you look at what actually happens when they come out of the virtual school…then it kind of just gets lost'. Ms Lea also commented that

> we used to have a transition officer that would do all the Year 11 work, making sure they've got colleges, and making sure they've visited them, and looked at their predicted grades…we had a really supportive process around applying for sixth form or further education. We haven't got a specific person for that now, which I think is a gap, so we tend to do that through the PEPs and through link workers, but it's not as focused.

Virtual heads highlighted establishing links with colleges as a priority and had given the issue considerable attention. However, as results had improved among this cohort, they were 'becoming more choosy' and 'shopping around', (Mr Steel), requiring the virtual school to establish new relationships with more institutions. He had recently been to one local college and pointed out that they had about 35 looked-after young people, of which around ten were from Ironside, but this was from a student population of thousands. He was about to forge a similar link with another institution and also attended sub-regional virtual school meetings, through which he could liaise with colleges in other authorities.

Designated teachers in non-mainstream settings – usually the head-teacher – were much more focused on transition planning than their colleagues in mainstream schools, but this was something they undertook for all their children. They were acutely aware of their status as provision of 'last resort' for the children entrusted to them, and the Pupil Referral Unit heads considered that some schools were pleased to hand over a young person and were unwilling to engage further. A number of participants from alternative providers would have liked to provide ongoing support to eighteen for young people, but plans for at least one special school to extend to eighteen had been scuppered by funding cuts. Ms Tan observed: 'we should go on to eighteen, because our kids aren't old enough to go out into the big wide world, in so many ways'.

In some ways there is much that the mainstream sector could learn from such providers, because they have long been used to dealing with resistance by colleges to taking on the young people from their institutions: as Mr Grey observed: 'they only

want the straightforward ones at college, it's cheaper'. All non-mainstream institutions from which I interviewed designated teachers also focused on providing the social skills young people would need to cope in college and were adept at putting together packages that would allow a gradual transition to provide some continuity at the outset. The Grove, for example, kept some children into Year 12 on a part-time basis concurrently with the first year of college, to enable them to make a more gradual transition, in the way Ms Carmine had recommended unsuccessfully for Niall (see section 5.4.2). Ms Olive was also proactive in seeking an indication from local authorities at an early stage as to whether a child would stay in the area after sixteen or be returned to the home borough, in order to make concrete plans, commenting 'I have had some surprising responses to that in the past…"oh, we don't know, we couldn't talk about it". I tend to be…"this child needs to know, they need to make plans"'. When I met with Mr Grey in mid-May of Ollie's Year 11, he said 'I haven't had his destination paperwork yet…we were pressing, after Christmas, for them to get their act together…'

Ironbridge had a high proportion of older young people out-of-borough and had appointed an advisory teacher based in the county in which most of those children were placed. She facilitated the transition to colleges and also worked with the post-sixteen social work team within the borough. The virtual school had recently extended from finishing at sixteen to covering young people up to eighteen and Mr Steel had created a new post-sixteen PEP to make them more effective at this transitional stage.

6.4.4 ***Support at college***

Unfortunately, 'drop-out' rates from college were reportedly high, for a number of reasons. Ms Ford observed:

> I was disappointed last year, we did have a bigger drop out than I expected… I was naïve enough to think that once they got to college they would be fine, but they weren't…I think schools are very good at supporting, and I won't say bending the rules, but perhaps being a little bit more sympathetic, and colleges have hard and fast rules, and the fact that children had been in care, they kept on saying "well, this is college policy, if their attendance rate has dropped below 85 per cent they are out".

Mr Steel confirmed that

> when they go into FE colleges it's about keeping them…getting them to actually turn up in the morning on a regular basis…Because the ones that are staying on in school are much more likely to be the ones that are doing level 3 qualification and are more focused.

About 25 per cent of the Ironbridge students dropped out of college, an issue that was the responsibility of the post-sixteen social work team, who could request the assistance of the virtual school should they choose to do so (Mr Steel). This figure was very similar to that given by Eastside College, where by March the sixty looked-after students enrolled at the start of the academic year had been reduced to forty-five.

Of the eleven young people in the study who went straight to college in Year 12, four (Elliott, Priya, Riley and Unity) 'dropped out' of college while a further two (Gilroy and Niall) were excluded for their behaviour. Despite Ms Gold's concerns, Imogen had a good attendance record at college and was studying level 2 Childcare in Year 13, having successfully completed level 1; she was planning to remain until she attained level 4. Elliott did not participate in the study after Year 11, so I was unable to ask him why he left his course. Priya, Unity and Riley all had patchy or disrupted school attendance records. Priya was unable to articulate her reasons, but her school attendance had been very limited. She did not know what she wanted to do for a career but had attended a beauty therapy course 'for a bit'. Unity simply said 'college ain't really my thing'. Riley appeared to have difficulty settling on a career path. He had achieved level 2 in Public Services with a view to entering the fire or ambulance services, but level 3 was predominantly about the police force, so he switched to hair and beauty, but started too late to catch up and left college. He was planning to return the next year if he did not pass the army's Combat Medical Technician exams when he retook them. Ms Teal was aware that at least two of the five or so looked-after young people who left Meadowpond after Year 11 had 'dropped out' of college; neither had remained in Meadowpond's local authority area, but had been moved to independent living placements in their 'home' authority.

Often there was no equivalent to a designated teacher in colleges. Only the smallest of the three colleges in Wadebridge had a safeguarding officer. Ms Ford had 'a very close relationship' with her and she would provide a point of contact with individual heads of departments and facilitate meetings. Similarly, one of the colleges in Ironside had a named member of staff for looked-after young people, who monitored their attendance,

review and PEPs and flagged up any concerns with the virtual school. Often, however it was a case of 'having to build a relationship with the individual course tutors' (Ms Ford).

Colleges, for their part, found communication with local authorities challenging, with Ms Oak saying

> what I find I struggle sometimes with as an education provider, is knowing who to speak to, and knowing within [a local authority] what's available for our looked-after children from the virtual school, and what support's in place for them…

Although observing that it would be helpful to have more information about young people and communication channels within local authorities, Ms Oak took the view that the responsibility lay primarily with colleges:

> at the end of the day the people that have to take responsibility is the college; they are our students and…for the time they are with us they are our responsibility, so we do need to be the ones to take that role…because we are, I suppose, in many cases, the…closest thing to a support network that that young person will have.

Not all colleges appeared to take a similar stance, however. One of the colleges at Wadebridge was so big that 'they don't even know the students on some courses' (Ms Ford) and the third took a robust approach to non-attendance:

> we had one lad at [college], who is doing motor vehicle studies, and we had to really push to get a meeting…he [the tutor] had no empathy whatsoever, no understanding whatsoever. He just said – "well, he's an adult now, if he wants to come and do the work he does the work. I tell him what you've got to do, if he chooses not to do it that's his problem". Which was really very worrying, and he dropped out, needless to say that lad didn't last very long, despite having had a meeting to try and explain the kind of extra support that was needed, it was obvious that this chap was never going to be in a position to provide it.

Ms Tan pointed out that this attitude was very different from that at school for her EBD students:

> as far as having… a positive relationship with our FE colleges, it's quite actually difficult to do that... if you don't turn up for lectures, and you don't turn up for classes you get chucked out, it's as simple as that. Whereas here you have children wandering around school going "I don't want to go to that lesson" – so you work

> at them all day to get them to go to lessons and get them back on track…a lot of our children end up as NEETs, because they get lost after that...we need to say…"you come in here and discover what you need in your college to make these children's lives work better".

Ms Oak observed that it would be constructive for Forest Hill College to be informed of crisis points in a young person's life:

> this young person in our foundation studies area…she has particular emotional behavioural difficulties…but her behaviour started deteriorating and getting worse…we ended up saying she's going down disciplinary route, and we had a meeting with the social worker and the virtual school…and they are starting the process of her leaving her carers that she's been with for two years, and that absolutely now makes sense as to why…her behaviour has deteriorated so severely, but I think if we had known before…it would have helped us to help her, and I think when you think with the exception of their carers we probably spend the most amount of time with these young people, and being given a heads up before, I think, some stuff like that, would be really helpful.

Ms Willow at Eastside College had a similar experience:

> one boy…he refused to keep coming, and we found out that he had history that hadn't been shared with us until we'd actually decided he wasn't staying, and then social care got involved and said "oh you can't"…so I think we fell down on those hurdles right at the beginning with that young man, because had we known that we could have made sure things were in place. So it was between us all, we hadn't linked up to the borough…So we did give him another chance, and we interviewed him with a care worker…He did one whole year, we had lots of meetings going over, he started the next year, got into more problems, and then he left.

Only three members of staff from further education colleges participated in the study. Among the three colleges represented, there was considerable variation in the degree of development of services specifically for care leavers. At Eastside College, there was a designated opportunities coach for looked-after students, Ms Maple, who was very new in the post when I interviewed her, although she thought there had been such a post for some years prior to that. At Millbank College, there was a team of ten in safeguarding, of which Ms Willow, the learner services manager, was responsible for the looked-after students. Until 2012 however, when I undertook the interview with Ms Willow, Millbank College did not know how many looked-after students were at the college and relied on professionals to inform them of students ('but we know that's not working'). With the advent of the 16-19 bursary, Millbank College had added a question on care

status to the online interview form and asked students to indicate their status on the bursary application form. Without advance notice, students were often identified only once an issue occurred and either the tutor discovered that the contact number given was that of a social worker, or foster carers, residential home managers or social workers contacted the college.

The most developed was Forest Hill College, where the director of learning services, Ms Oak, took responsibility for care leavers, reflecting a similar level of seniority to that required for a designated teacher in schools. The total population of Forest Hill was just under twelve thousand students, of which about 4,500 were aged sixteen to eighteen, and 45 of those (i.e. 1 per cent) were care leavers. Ms Oak commented on the complexity introduced by the number of different local authorities with which she dealt, but she had initiated partnership agreements with local authorities (starting the year before I spoke to her). Where these were in place, either advisory teachers from the virtual school or social workers were based in the college for the first six weeks of the year to support the transition of their young people into college.

Support for looked-after children started from interview because in Ms Oak's experience 'by supporting the transition to college we are far more likely to retain them'. Retention strategies included early introduction of the young person to a member of the college student support staff by the local authority case worker, so that there was an immediate and familiar point of contact within the college; enabling young people to make appointments with, and meet, their social worker at college; inviting local authority staff to any disciplinary or other meetings; and weekly reporting of attendance to virtual heads. Forest Hill also combined the course reviews young people undertook with their tutors with PEP reviews with their social worker so that they did not have to endure two similar meetings.

A scheme that Ms Oak regarded as particularly effective and employed with a number of vulnerable groups was an enhanced induction process, in which looked-after children as a group were given a talk from the student support team about what support the college offered and ensured that they all completed their 16-19 bursary application forms. The college highlighted to young people the practical support available, such as supporting the virtual school where a placement move was anticipated, when the college could, for example, press for reconsideration based on travel difficulties, or if necessary

use learner support funds to finance their fare. What emerged from Ms Oak's account was a strong sense of the importance of attention to the every-day details of a young person's life and a willingness to advise and advocate for that young person in the same way that designated teachers described.

The retention rate for care leavers at Forest Hill College in the year of the interview was 95 per cent, higher than the overall college rate. This had been the result of focused attention to the issue, although Ms Oak pointed out that there were some circumstances, such as placement moves, or personal circumstances militating against the engagement of a young person, that were beyond the control of the college or the virtual school. She concluded that 'it would be a lot harder…if we didn't have good relationships with the virtual schools', but 'it isn't difficult…once you start having the conversations'. Such examples demonstrate that the further education estate has the potential to facilitate good transitions for young people from Key Stage 4 to higher education or employment where colleges are willing and able to work with local authorities and to take time to understand the individual challenges faced by young people.

6.4.5 ***The educational trajectories of young people***

As the study progressed, the future appeared more daunting to young people and their prospects more uncertain. For some, this was the consequence of the inevitable setbacks associated with competitive career choices, such as becoming a doctor (Bashir) or actor (Devora), and for the three young men who would have liked a career in football. These issues may apply to many of their peers too, in the context of an identified misalignment of young people's career aspirations with opportunities in the labour market (Mann et al., 2013). However, most of the young people in this study were disappointed that in their own estimation they had not achieved in line with their academic potential. Furthermore, they were juggling multiple transitions in their lives over the two to three years that I followed them, with simultaneous transitions in care, as they moved from the looked-after children team to the leaving care team and for some, then the transitions team; in accommodation, with moves from foster or residential care to semi- and/or fully independent living; in education; and in their personal lives, with leaving care providing them with an opportunity to re-establish relationships with their birth family – for better or worse.

Young people's prospects were highly divergent. By the end of the study (the summer of Year 13), one third (seven) of the group were NEET, in line with national statistics for care leavers at age nineteen (DfE/NS, 2013b). Bashir could confidently be expected to attain the grades he needed to attend university (although he had not obtained an offer to study Medicine, as he had hoped), Kayla would probably go to university and Adam might also do so. Tasmin was not interviewed in Year 13, but appeared to be on track to attend higher education should she wish to do so. Imogen and Jacinda both planned to attend university but would take another year or two to acquire the necessary qualifications. Devora did not get into professional drama school and remained at her current college after Year 13, but could access university at a later stage, and potentially Sofia might also do so if she successfully completed college.

Table 6.2 overleaf shows the developing aspirations and plans of the young people over the course of the study in so far as they could be gleaned from interviews, given that only ten young people participated in the final year of the study.

Table 6.2: Young people's changing plans over time

Name	Plans Year 11	Plans Year 12	Plans Year 13	Comments
Adam	Building / public services	PPE at Oxbridge? Then business	university / apprenticeship, construction	'I don't care if I hate what I do… I want the qualifications and the money. Then… caring for other people… That's what I want to do, charity work and stuff'.
Bashir	Medicine	Medicine	Medicine: offer BioMedical Sci	'I didn't know it was going to be that hard to get into university'.
Callum	Plumber?	Plumber?	Carpenter? Construction boring.	Wants to stay another year to do new cookery course. 'I don't know what to do to be honest, but a chef, I suppose it could be good'.
Devora	Singer/ actress/ dancer	Performing arts BTEC	3 rejections for drama/musical theatre, awaiting fourth	'it's all I've wanted to do...Since I can remember'. 'Plan B is to take a year out… travelling, volunteering …And just get work …because I need to support myself'.
Elliott	Footballer /fire service	Dropped out of college	NEET, plans unknown	
Farouk	Footballer/ accountant	Footballer/ media.	Unknown but back in college	Excluded from sports college (immigration)
Gilroy	Coaching: 'too old' for footballer	Sports Science at university	NEET, plans unknown	Y12: 'I don't know what I'm going to do yet' – not thinking past 18 project.
Habib	Electronics	Carpentry level 1	Royal Marines, meanwhile Hospitality and Catering level 1	'I felt pressured…they [carers] were like "if you change this course what are you gonna do next week?"... And I had too much pride, I told them like I will finish this course… I can't do a three year course, I'd just lose interest'.
Imogen	Child care (nursery)	Psychology at university	Nursery teacher.	Y12: 'later on, I want to be a child psychologist …My sister does psychology in uni'
Jacinda	Children's therapist/ art teacher/ photographer	'I've been babysitting … it's not as…I thought …, working with children'.	General Health and Social Care BTec; planning to go on to University to study Nursing	Y11: 'help out people that were fostered, because I understand them …but I don't think I would get to it, because I'd have to pick psychology'; 'I had a therapist myself, and I really liked her, and then she really inspired me.' Foster mother suggested child nursing.
Kayla	performing arts/sports psychologist/ sports therapist	Coaching or sports psychology.	Sports psychologist/ drama therapist.	'I want to work with people who are in difficult situations, like I was'; 'If I do a Masters I want to do drama therapy…so I can understand'.
Luis	Actor/plasterer	Media at college		Drama/music: 'I don't think I'll be so successful at them things…because I wouldn't have much experience… like camera crew, I'd be more successful…'

Michael	Zoo keeper			
Niall	apprenticeship in plumbing	College/ NEET	NEET, plans unknown	'I've got to go to college so I can get a level two in my reading and writing'. SW Y13 Gang-affiliated (not in gang). He's v angry, trying to get him an apprenticeship; he needs to be outside emptying rubbish. N's teeth are rotten, has dog – v good with animals – dog is a companion really.
Ollie	college to do cooking and to go to the library by himself.		NEET (disability)	Will be dependent all his life 'I want to go college, I don't want to come here no more…'cos it's for children… I want to help some people…I like working with children
Priya		Beauty therapy 'for a bit'.	NEET	'Of course I want a career. I just don't know what I want to do'.
Qadira	? run her own beauty business, looking for job/apprentice ship in meantime.	Training in a hairdressing salon/ applying for jobs, retail, everything.	NEET Looking for jobs: 'Any jobs, retail, anything.'	Y13: 'I've gone sort of off beauty and hairdressing... I'm trying to get myself on track to go college and get a job or something, you know? I never thought I would get to this point, but I have, so it's good'. Would still like to run her own business but hasn't thought further about that: 'No, still young, still got time'.
Riley	No interview Year 11	Public Services level 2 BTEC for fire or ambulance service.	NEET Combat medical technician, job for couple of months	Has to retake army exam: 'if they don't accept me then I will go back to hair and beauty' [level 2]. Job hunting: 'I did have one, as bar staff, but I got made redundant. It got shut down'.
Sofia	Fashion designer 'I don't have any other plan'.			'It's very strange because I remember the first day when I come to school … I forget everything when I do textiles, and everything just go and you focus on what I'm doing.
Tasmin	Psychology: carer's son did A level; previously teacher /midwife/ work with children	Accounting? 'I really like doing business'.		(SW) 'said that like being a midwife wasn't a good job, she kind of put me off'. 'I got onto a course to do health and social care … it was like everyone that failed their GCSEs horribly... so I was like "I don't want to do it, I want to achieve better than that"'.
Unity		NEET applying for admin apprenticeships		I was doing a childcare course…but I didn't complete it… obviously I'm just going to keep my options open, I don't know yet; sewing/soft furnishing 2 hrs/week.

6.5 Care, education and life chances

Neither Gilroy nor Qadira (both late entrants into care) had managed to settle in school. Gilroy thought care had made no difference to his educational prospects, on the basis that he had 'never been someone like to sit down for hours and hours and do stuff'. Qadira thought that entering care had been good for her, but that in educational terms it had given her more freedom, which she had used to truant, as set out in section 5.2.1. For the most part however, young people expressed a strong appreciation of the educational opportunities that care had opened up for them. Habib commented 'I wouldn't have got nothing, hardly ever went to school'; Adam said his prospects 'are much better, a hundred percent, I'm going to school more, I've got a place to study' and he also explained 'if you want to work hard and you know nothing bad's going to happen or whatever then you can work hard'. Jacinda said 'when I moved to this family when I was eight I did not know how to read or write properly, and my foster mum actually made me sit down and she forced me to write and read properly'. Kayla thought: 'if I wasn't in care then I don't think I would be motivated to anything, I wouldn't have a mindset of what I wanted to do'.

Nonetheless, as Table 6.1 shows, most of the young people's attainment at Key Stage 4 was significantly below that required to assure normative progression at Key Stage 5 and entry into the labour market in adulthood. Virtual heads evidenced growing attention to practice at Key Stage 5, in terms of supporting young people who attained well at GCSEs to reach their potential, as well as addressing the needs of those who struggled to engage. They recognised that for policy reasons local authorities' focus has tended in the past to be on Key Stage 4 attainment, and the prevention of young people becoming 'NEET'. This had perhaps been at the cost of attention to post-sixteen provision for looked-after young people who attain reasonably well at Key Stage 4 and to encouraging young people who have not fulfilled their academic potential to enhance their educational qualifications at Key Stage 5. Virtual heads in the study referred to a need to refocus some of their work, from 'supporting those young people post-sixteen, who look as if they are going to fall out of everything' (Mr Brook) to ensuring that able students fulfil their potential at A level and through entry to higher education.

Analysis of the data suggested an emerging recognition that young people can often make up considerable ground at Key Stage 5, and commitment to enabling them to do so. Mr Brook stated:

> it is very important to try and give… young people…a second chance post-sixteen… young people who haven't really done very much at all … with support, by seventeen, eighteen, have managed to sort of find their feet and begin to gain some… qualifications.

Ms Lea explained:

> I know there's a lot more success when they get older because maybe they can manage what's happened better, but us expecting them to be brilliant at sixteen, like everybody else is, is quite difficult…it's not because they haven't got the ability, or they are not willing, it's about what's happening in the processes in their lives, and they are trying to manage all of that and do school.

The high proportion of children entering care after primary school age renders attention to flexibility and continuing high aspirations post-sixteen of particular importance. The evidence of this study suggests that young people over the age of sixteen are currently better supported at school than in college in most instances, although it is important to bear in mind that the more academically successful young people are more likely to remain in school at Key Stage 5. Some further education colleges appear to be at an early stage in communicating with local authorities to provide appropriate support for care leavers. The key priorities for local authorities should be ensuring that virtual schools extend to eighteen or beyond to enable improved transition arrangements from school to college. Consideration should be given to the efficacy of the leaving care team model in comparison to prioritising continuity of social work support at a time of multiple transitions in young people's lives.

As their results improve, looked-after young people are able to access a wider range of educational institutions, but enabling them to do so will require considerable knowledge and expertise on the part of their corporate parent. If the current reforms lead to a wider range of qualifications available in schools post-sixteen, this may enable more young people to remain in a familiar and supportive environment, but it is imperative that attention is paid to support for this cohort in further education colleges as well as in new educational institutions that are not under the control of local authorities. Although the size of further education colleges may render attention to the individual needs of young people more challenging, there are fewer such institutions in each local authority and they are likely to include significant numbers of care leavers by virtue of their size. There is therefore considerable scope for collaboration between virtual schools and further education colleges, but this is an area in which research is lacking.

Virtual schools which extend to eighteen and beyond are uniquely placed to offer continuity of support to young people throughout their education career, regardless of changes of education and care placement and geographical moves across local authority boundaries. However, it is crucial that in promoting the attainment of successful young people, the needs of those who are most at risk of social exclusion in adulthood are not forgotten and this will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter 7:

Education, Corporate Parenting and Foundational Rights

7.1 Introduction

The evidence of this study confirms that the last twenty-five years have witnessed some improvement in the educational prospects of looked-after children (Jackson, 2013b). Almost all the young people in this study acknowledged that removal into care had been the right decision in their case and most acknowledged that being in care had improved their life chances. It should be borne in mind that I was unable to take into account variations in young people's innate abilities (a contested and problematic concept in any event). Rather, the views and expectations of young people and professionals have been used as a basis for assessment of the extent to which young people reached their educational potential by the end of the study.

As recounted in the previous chapters, most if not all of the young people felt that they had not yet fulfilled their educational potential. The reasons for this are complex and varied and have been explored in some detail in the preceding chapters. They include the effects of young people's pre-care experiences, family circumstances and late entry into care; disruption in their personal lives and education when in care; the multitude of challenges faced simultaneously by young people and coinciding with the developmental tasks of adolescence; multiple transitions and physical moves in education and care imposed by state institutions during late adolescence; and the opportunities to reconnect with birth families arising when young people turned eighteen.

In this chapter I draw together the findings in relation to young people's care and their education. I consider the inter-relationship between the two in the light of the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 3 in order to consider how the state's responsibilities to care leavers might best be conceptualised and defined. Hollingsworth's notion of foundational rights is used to assert that understanding of what it means to be a fully autonomous adult requires that young people be equipped

with the assets or central human capabilities identified as pre-requisites to securing individuals' fundamental rights. In particular, the concept draws attention to the importance of relational aspects of autonomy and the primacy of personal relationships and social networks in the development of 'full' autonomy in addition to more familiar aspects such as an adequate education.

First I draw on the focal model of adolescence to illuminate young people's accounts of their experiences in order to help explain why this particular group of young people are particularly likely to need additional time and support during adolescence as they grapple with multiple challenges during a key developmental stage in their lives. I consider the implications of and potential opportunities offered by the raising of the age to which children are required to remain in education and training for the provision of extended support to young people who may not have performed to their full academic potential at Key Stage 4. Second, I apply Stein's categorization of care leavers to the life trajectories to date of the young people participating in the study. I use this as a means by which to explore the divergent trajectories of young people and to consider the extent to which current policy may tend to exaggerate such divergence rather than redress the balance in favour of the most disadvantaged or vulnerable young people. I evaluate the likely effect of the new 'Staying Put' provisions in this context. Finally I utilize the concepts of foundational rights and of the state's reparatory responsibility to reconsider the state's duties to care leavers and in particular the notion of corporate parenting. Drawing on the evidence of all participants to the study, I evaluate social care and education policy in this area with particular attention to the challenges inherent in the corporate parenting model in meeting the individual needs of looked-after children, and the role of designated teachers and virtual schools heads in improving the educational and life outcomes for care leavers.

7.2 Young people's experiences viewed through the lens of the focal model of adolescence

The data gathered from both young people and professionals in the course of this study attests eloquently to the complexities in all domains of the lives of young people ageing out of care and to the interdependence of their experiences in education and in care. I have situated these experiences within the developmental context of adolescence,

because this is a time during which all children undertake core developmental tasks as well as undergoing key life-course transitions. The focal model of adolescence posits that adolescents attend to the developmental tasks of adolescence consecutively and may struggle to cope with multiple concurrent challenges (Coleman, 2011). The focal model helps to explain the impact on young people's educational experiences and outcomes of late entry into care, placement instability, concurrent transitions in varying areas of young people's lives, and the renegotiation of birth family relationships on reaching adulthood. Strengths of the model include the fact that it can be applied to the experiences of all young people without singling out those with specific deficits or vulnerabilities; that it acknowledges the universal developmental tasks of adolescence; and that it respects the agency of young people in constructing their own adolescence and managing the issues they confront.

Most young people in care carry significant emotional burdens arising from their pre-care experiences. These are likely to be exacerbated for those entering care late - often after many years of maltreatment - who may also have considerable educational deficits to overcome. A large proportion of looked-after young people have mental health difficulties (Meltzer et al., 2003; Blower et al., 2004; Ford et al., 2007), which may be exacerbated as they make the transition from care to independent living (Stein and Dumaret, 2011). It should be borne in mind this study was not able to address these issues, which are as diverse as young people's care histories.

7.2.1 *Managing multiple transitions and challenges*

In this study eight young people entered care (or at least were removed from the care of their parents) before the start of secondary school. Within this group are all six of the young people with the most stable placements (Adam, Imogen, Jacinda, Kayla, Michael, and Tasmin) and, excluding the orphans Bashir and Devora, these were the young people with the highest educational qualifications and they were the most likely to progress to university. Five of the participants entered care aged thirteen or over (Niall, Priya, Qadira, Riley and Sofia) and, with the exception of the unaccompanied asylum-seeker Sofia, this group were all NEET in Year 13. This study sample therefore reflects the wider picture of poorer outcomes for late entrants into care (Sinclair et al., 2007). The accounts given by both young people and professionals to explain their difficulties resonate with the focal model in the way in which issues are tackled consecutively rather

than concurrently. These include that of Adam as to his inability to focus on academic performance until Year 10; the young man described by Ms Tan as abandoning schoolwork when reintroduced to his mother; and the way in which Priya stressed her need to 'sort her life out' before she could address education. While treatment or counselling for trauma may be required before some young people can address other issues in their lives, the focal model helps to explain why the 'accelerated and compressed' transitions to adulthood (Stein 2006a, page 174) so often experienced by care leavers, particularly those entering care late, may be unmanageable for them.

The focal model also draws attention to the deleterious effect of the multiple and simultaneous transitions faced by this group as described by professionals in section 5.4.2. From the perspective of the focal model, state institutions of both education and social care are organised in such a way as to superimpose social transitions, such as the move to the leaving care team and moving from school to college, upon naturally-occurring developmental tasks for young people who are already facing a 'back-log' of deficits in education as well as in aspects of their personal lives. This is arguably an example of the way in which institutions may operate, albeit unwittingly, to reproduce power or disadvantage as described by Fineman (2008). In this context, we should be unsurprised by professional accounts of young people's lives 'unravelling' as Ms Teal described it, in the period under consideration in this study.

The focal model of adolescence is also illuminative of two other key areas of interest in this study, namely the particular significance to young people of their relationships with their birth families and the interdependence of care and educational experiences and outcomes. As set out in 3.2.2, although peers become more influential in young people's lives in adolescence, the significance of parental support to self-esteem does not decline and remains critical in the domains of school and family (Harter, 2012). For looked-after young people, late adolescence brings the opportunity to renegotiate these relationships, often after lengthy periods in which they have been constrained or managed by children's social care services. Use of the focal model highlights an area of their lives in which the developmental tasks of adolescence – in this case, construction of a theory of the self through, amongst other things, parental influences on self-esteem – are complicated for looked-after young people. The concept of 'arenas of comfort' (Simmons et al., 1987) alluded to in section 3.2.3 suggests that stability of positive birth family contact may go some way to mitigate the stress of multiple concurrent life

changes. On reaching eighteen, young people are free to rekindle relationships with birth parents and their wider birth family.

In this study, feelings of rejection and/or loss with regard to relationships with birth parents were acute for many participants. The extent to which relationships with their birth parents were a source of distress and a preoccupation for young people is reported in 5.2.2, and reflects the findings of other research, including Sinclair et al. (2005) and Biehal et al. (2010). Sen and Broadhurst (2011: page 306) conclude that the literature 'very clearly underscores a critical role for social workers in supporting contact…with respect to long-term placements', in the light of evidence of the effect of quality of contact on placement stability reported in 2.2.2.2. Research has identified the risks involved in children becoming caught up in potentially damaging family dynamics through contact with their birth families (Sen and Broadhust, 2011). However, consideration of the focal model may shift attention to issues of timeliness and in particular the importance of establishing patterns of high quality contact as early as possible wherever it is safe to do so, and where it is not, ensuring the child is given appropriate explanations of that decision (Sen and Broadhust, 2011).

This study also found that, contrary to the statutory requirement that siblings should be placed together unless impracticable (Children Act s22C(8)), but consistent with the literature (Sen and Broadhust, 2011), many young people were placed apart from their siblings either on entry into care or as circumstances changed at later dates. While some of these changes may have been unavoidable, they were not only a source of distress to young people, they also inflicted further significant life changes over the course of the study on young people already burdened by multiple changes. More research is needed into contact with siblings for children in out-of-home care (Sen and Broadhurst, 2011), particularly in the context of the complex family structures described by many participants in this study. Where young people have had limited or no contact with members of their birth family when they are under eighteen, more attention could be paid to preparatory counselling and advice for young people before they seek to re-establish these relationships.

7.2.2 *Raising the age to which children are required to remain in education and/or training*

It was apparent that the period of young people's lives covered by the study was regarded by professionals as critical to their long-term success, and that there were both opportunities and particular difficulties associated with the transition to further education for looked-after young people. Participants identified a number of characteristics of the looked-after population which created particular challenges in ensuring a successful educational transition at sixteen, especially the high proportion of late entrants into care and behavioural issues. I have explored in section 6.4 the varied states of progress in virtual schools and particularly in further education colleges in relation to facilitating a successful transition from Key Stage 4 to Key Stage 5 and in section 6.3 the seeming shift of focus in favour of high-achieving individuals. There was evidence, however, of attention to the need to reengage older young people in education and training. In The Valleys, Ms Lea commented that 'by Year 12, 13…more of them have picked up or come back into education, because that is the push'.

The details of the government's attempts to improve the qualifications of young people aged sixteen to nineteen who did not achieve maths and English GCSE at grades A*-C are beyond the scope of this thesis, but from September 2103, students who have not attained these qualifications are required to continue studying towards them in their 16-19 programme of study. From 2014, this is a condition of funding (Hancock, 2014). New 'trailblazing' apprenticeship guidance also requires that young people obtain level 1 maths and English qualifications as part of their apprenticeship (HM Government, 2014). Since the employment of young people has been particularly affected by the economic crisis (Wales, 2014), it is crucial that as economic circumstances improve the government focuses its attention on enabling this generation to engage in the labour market.

These extended opportunities for young people to acquire basic skills are important in a labour market requiring a skilled workforce. In relation to care leavers, they may be a means to fulfil government rhetoric around offering young people 'more than one chance to succeed' (HM Government, 2010: paragraph 5.6) and providing them with 'the opportunities and chances needed to help them move successfully to adulthood' (Department for Education, 2010b: page 1). The 'apprenticeship offer' under section 69 of the Education Act 2011, like its predecessor, is open not only to all young people

aged sixteen to eighteen but also care leavers aged nineteen to 24 who give notice to the local authority of their intention to pursue education or training before the age of 21, giving recognition to the delayed progress of many such young people (see Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 section 83A(5)).

At Wadebridge, Ms Ford described the sixteen-plus transition as 'a bit hit and miss up to now', but 'targeted as an area for real development over the next few months'. Wadebridge was implementing a 'Care to Work' plan, involving work experience and developing work skills:

> We have a group within the borough….which is looking at trying to provide work opportunities for the more vulnerable children, and looking at apprenticeship schemes, work experience placements, some training on developing work skills like CV writing and interview skills. We also have our own in-house version of Connexions…which targets the most vulnerable children, of which all our looked-after children, obviously, come into that category. So they will all have regular six monthly, or more frequent, interviews with an advisor to help them, make sure they are taking advantage of work opportunities, ready and prepared for them.

However, engaging young people who are at risk of social exclusion requires prior attention to their care and relationships needs, since, without stable accommodation and the ability to engage with professionals, any form of training or employment will be beyond their reach. Mr Steel commented:

> you can quite often estimate who is going to end up as a NEET much earlier than we currently do…I think we've got better tracking systems in place…I have got three that look very definitely like NEETs to me, and yes…we are working on those at the moment, and they've worked intensively with two out of the three, to no avail. We are not able to turn them around.

7.3 **Assessing young people's resilient adaptation**

There are obvious parallels between aspects of the focal model of adolescence and a resilience framework. For example, the notion in the resilience literature that the clustering of risk factors reduces the likelihood of resilient adaptation resonates with the proposition in focal theory that young people address challenges consecutively and may not be able to manage concurrent multiple life changes. Both theories have been used in this analysis because they offer different insights into the particular experiences of

young people ageing out of care. As explained above, the focal model is of particular relevance because it is premised upon the developmental context of adolescence. Resilient adaptation in contrast is pertinent to, and may change over, the life course and may be influenced in unpredictable ways by critical events (MacDonald, 2007). However, it is the framework most commonly used to consider the trajectories of care leavers, doubtless because as a cohort they experience higher exposure to the identified risk factors for poor resilient adaptation (Coleman and Hagell, 2007a). Strengths of a resilience framework also include acknowledgement of children's agency, incorporation of the effect of interaction between the child and their environment and a focus on strengths and competence rather than deficits and maladjustment (Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000), as set out in section 3.3.

A resilience framework was chosen for this study for two reasons. First, evidence indicates that educational attainment is a key factor in facilitating resilient adaptation in adolescence, together with a supportive relationship with a competent adult, a sense of personal agency and good peer relationships (Masten and others, 1990; Luthar and Ciccetti, 2000; Rutter, 2000). Second, Stein (2012) has developed a categorisation of care leavers based on the principles of resilient adaptation and set out in section 3.3.3 This is adopted in the following analysis in relation to the young people taking part in this study. It is important to bear in mind that this analysis is made tentatively and in acknowledgement that participants were still very young at the time the study ended, with considerable uncertainty and fluidity in all aspects of their lives. Nonetheless the exercise is arguably a useful one in assessing the likely life trajectories of young people in early adulthood and to inform the application of foundational rights theory to analyse current law and policy and suggest a change in focus for the attention of policy-makers.

7.3.1 *Applying Stein's categorisations to young people's life experiences*

In Tables 7.1-7.3 young people are organised into suggested categories (Stein, 2006b; Stein, 2012) on the basis of their history and circumstances at the end of the study, in so far as they were known. The typical characteristics of each group are stated in an abbreviated fashion before the tables for ease of reference (a fuller account of the categories is given in section 3.3.3). Young people are rated by one to three ★s to indicate their apparent functioning in each domain: to an extent the judgement is

inevitably influenced by my impressions of young people in interview. Ollie is not included as he will be dependent all his life.

Moving on:

Stability, secure attachment, some educational success; left care later than average in a planned move; felt well-prepared for independence; able to take advantage of support; positive identity through participating in the 'normal' trajectories of further or higher education, partnering and parenthood.

Survivors:

Regard themselves as self-reliant - but often continuing dependence on services and difficulty in making and keeping supportive relationships; left care younger, often in response to a trigger incident; limited or no academic qualifications; may be assisted by new supportive relationships and stable accommodation; rekindling birth family relationships may be helpful or problematic.

Strugglers:

Pre-care maltreatment militates against stability in care; cumulative histories of disruption and emotional, behavioural and social problems may culminate in rejection and alienation of professional and personal support, early age of leaving care and a high likelihood of unemployment and homelessness requiring specialist professional services.

Table 7.1: Summary of young people's risk and protective factors using Stein's resilience categorisations: 'Moving On'

Name	Stability	Education	Planned/ early exit	Prepared for indep/ce	Supportive relation/ps	Positive identity
Adam	★★From Y6	★★★ University offers	★★can stay with carers but chooses to leave at 18	★★★ working, well-supported, mature	★★ with carers, DT, SW, not birth family	self-reliant but readily accepts help, good peer relationships
Bashir	★★Since entry to UK in Y8	★★★ Predicted 4 A*s at A2	★★can stay with carers but chooses to leave at 18	★★★ mature and self-sufficient, extended family in UK	★★with carers, extended family – lost birth family	self-reliant, hard-working and ambitious
Devora	★★★ With cousin since care at age 13	★★★ Good but struggling to get perf. arts place	★★can stay with carers but chooses to leave at 18	★★★ mature and reflective	★★★esp with cousin,	responsible, empathetic, sees herself as orphan rather than LAC
Imogen	★ 'Loads' of carers, unhappy in long-term placement	★★Modest but steady progress	💣 sudden disruption in Year 12	★★★ managing supported independent well	★★ poor relationship carer, good with birth M & extended foster fam	very quiet, appears timid but thoughtful
Jacinda	★★★At least 4, stable from age 8 – feels like own family	★★To college Y13 after struggling at school, planning university (Nursing)	★★★ expects to stay put until graduates	★★★ able to take her time, proactive in seeking educational support	★★★ excellent relationship with foster carers, problematic with birth family	Seems somewhat lacking in confidence at times
Kayla	★★★2 carers, last from age 6	★★★ Expecting to go to university (Sports Psychology /Coaching)	★★★ expects to stay put until first university long vacation	★★★ able to take her time, proactive in seeking educational support	★★ good relationship with carers, complex with birth family	Difficulty with personal relationships, otherwise good; many extra-curricular activities
Michael	★★★ From age 4	★★ ? (Asperger's Syndrome)	★★★ carers would have liked to adopt	★★★ able to take his time (young for age)	★★ good relationship with carers, but slightly anxious	Confident
Sofia?	★To UK Y11, short placement	?	★★?chose semi-ind at 18	?mature but limited English	? difficulty making peer relation/ps	Mature and highly self-reliant
Tasmin	★★★ 4 carers, last since Y9	★★★ planning to go to university	★★place/t pressure: brother's behaviour	★★★mature and well-supported	★★★exc relationship with carer	Strong and lively character

Table 7.2: Summary of young people's risk and protective factors using Stein's resilience categorisations: 'Survivors'

Name	Stability	Education-al success	Planned exit	Prepared for independ'ce	Supportive relation/ps	Positive identity
Elliott	★★Stable foster care end Y6 to Y11, then unknown	dropped out of college Y12 **NEET**	Unknown - wanted to live with birth family Y11	?	★★with carers, extended family – none with birth family	wanted to be footballer or join fire service
Farouk	★ 2 place/ts, 1st unhappy, stable from end Y9	Mostly Ds at GSCE, excluded from college (imm) Y12, back in education Y13	★★could have stayed with carers but left to live with brother at 18	★carers protective, brother struggling to engage in education	★ex-carers supportive, brother unlikely to be positive role model	Anxious about immigration, fitness and being out of education in Y12.
Habib	4 carers from age 9, last 1 for 4-5 years	★Excluded from school; PRU; repeating level 1 college Y13	💣 sudden disruption	★supported independent clean & tidy but bare; struggling with college attendance	Felt rejected by carers and that they treated own son differently	Making concrete plans for future
Luis	In care at 7, stable from age 9	★Excluded, SEBD school, limited quals but attending college Y12,	Expects to stay with carers post-18 as younger sister there	Will need ongoing adult services	None apparent, with possible exception of older brother	Confused aspirations
Riley (Moving on if not NEET)	Youth justice route into care, 2 res homes	★ PRU, College level 2 Public Services, dropped out **NEET**	★residential care ended at 16, to supported lodgings	★★★ self-reliant and competent, retaking combat medical technician exams	★★Good relationship with landlords, manages birth family and peers	★★★ Articulate and frank, clear-sighted and personable, clear plans for the future

Table 7.3: Summary of young people's risk and protective factors using Stein's resilience categorisations: 'Survivors/strugglers' and 'strugglers'

Name	Stability	Education	Planned/ early exit	Prepared for independ'ce	Supportive relation/ps	Positive identity
Callum **survivor/ struggler**	Disrupted care history, difficult to care for	★Few quals, hopes to stay extra year at school	💣 sudden disruption Y12	★★ lonely living independently but seems to be coping	★with DT, girlfriend	Little idea what he would like to do
Gilroy **survivor/ struggler**	★ Single placement from entry to care Y7 but broke down Y12	Poor KS4 quals, 'kicked out' of college Y12, about to start 18 project **NEET**	💣 sudden disruption Y11/12	★in semi-independent Y12 but appeared unsettled	Unhappy in care, no strong relationship mentioned	Lacks confidence and maturity (Ms White), desire to go to university, 'too old' to be footballer
Priya survivor/ struggler	Foster care from 13, 4 care homes from 15	Left school at 16, ?no quals, college briefly, **NEET**	Move to supported accomm. at 16 – claims averse to living with strangers	Managing in supported accomm. with intensive keyworker support, tends not to attend for interviews etc	Struggles to engage with profls, avoids relation/ps with men, spends a lot of time with mother	Feels unable to engage in education until has 'sorted out' her life
Qadira **survivor/ struggler**	In care at 12/13, 3 carers	Left school Y10. NVQ level 1 hair dressing & literacy. **NEET**	Move to supported accomm. at 16	Managing in supported accomm. with intensive keyworker support	None apparent apart from key worker	Looking for jobs/ trying to get on track to go to college
Unity **survivor/ struggler**	Strong history of placement disruption – c10 res homes	Did not really attend 2ndary school, reluctant to go to college **NEET**	Move to supported accomm. at 16	Managing in supported accomm. with intensive keyworker support	Difficult relat/ps with profls, lost touch with supporting charity Y13	Angry at move away from home area
Niall **Struggler**	Into care cY8, 4 carers, last 'on & off'	Not literate, Excluded schools and colleges **NEET**	Carer lost status Y11/12	Semi-ind, did not attend housing panel	Not engaging in Y13	SW Y13 'gang-affiliated'

The wide range of young people's life trajectories can be clearly seen from Tables 7.1-7.3. Excluding Ollie, there are twenty young people, of whom nine appear to be moving on, five surviving, one struggling (Niall) and five categorised as surviving/struggling. The numbers are too small to be regarded as representative of the population and will have been influenced by the way in which young people were accessed: that is, through designated teachers in the main, but through a specialist leaving care support charity in the case of three vulnerable young people (Priya, Qadira and Unity). However, it is worth noting that the proportion of young people 'Moving On' is higher than that expected from Stein's work and that these young people appear to be well-placed academically to succeed in adulthood. Six (Adam, Bashir, Devora, Jacinda, Kayla and Tasmin) were expected to attain the qualifications needed to attend university, although it is likely that only Kayla, Tasmin and Adam would do so in the year they left school, as Bashir did not obtain any offers to study Medicine, and was reluctant to take the alternative course for which he had a place. Adam would take an apprenticeship instead of a university place if he could obtain one, Devora was intending to take a year out if she did not get into drama school, and Jacinda was a year behind her peers after transferring to college at the end of Year 12. Tasmin was not interviewed in Year 13.

The four girls in the 'university' group were the four participants with the most stable and supportive relationships with a key adult in their lives, in Devora's case her cousin and for the remaining three their foster carer. Adam and Bashir had also described supportive and stable foster care, despite choosing to leave for independent accommodation at the age of eighteen. All six exhibited a strong sense of personal agency and all reported good peer relationships, although Kayla was cautious and selective in her choice of friends and Devora had felt friendless at school but had made good relationships at college. It would have been useful to have been able to follow these young people for another year after they left school or college, in particular to ask for their views on their accommodation choices in hindsight, in the context of the focal model of adolescence.

The three remaining young people categorised as 'Moving On' were Imogen, Michael and Sofia. Relatively little data were gathered from Michael and Sofia, both of whom participated in the study only once. Michael had Asperger's Syndrome and rarely answered the questions asked, instead choosing his own agenda for the conversation. He was in a stable placement with his sister, where he had been since the age of four,

and was successfully attending a mainstream school. His carers would have adopted him had it not been for the fact that they would then have lost the social care support they received. Sofia spoke little about her personal life and had not been in the UK long when we spoke; she struggled to make friends in school, perhaps because she was a year below her chronological age and mature for her years as a result of her personal history, as well as because of her limited English. However she was articulate and determined, she had a strong sense of agency and appeared to be making good progress academically in the short space of time since she had arrived in the UK.

Imogen was a quiet but thoughtful young woman whose designated teacher was concerned that she would not cope at college and thought she should remain at school in Year 12. Imogen chose to go to college 'to make a new start' and contrary to expectations, progressed well there and was on track at the end of the study to become a nursery teacher. Imogen appeared to lack a close supportive adult in her life, having had a difficult relationship with her foster mother from around the age of ten until the placement broke down when she was seventeen. She confided her unhappiness in the placement only to a peer who was a member of her foster carer's extended family, with whom she had good relationships. She did not feel able to tell any adult at school or any of her social workers. Imogen returned to her birth mother on being forced to leave her foster home and felt that she should never have been placed in care, although she acknowledged that it had been beneficial in terms of educational support. She said 'I love living on my own. I don't have people saying [Imogen] can you do this, [Imogen] can you do that'.

A high proportion of the young participants remained very vulnerable. Seven of the young people – a third of the cohort – were NEET at the end of the study, in line with national statistics for care leavers (DfE/NS, 2014a). These were Elliott, Gilroy, Niall, Priya, Qadira, Riley and Unity. The remaining four young people (Callum, Farouk, Habib and Luis) were in school or college but had limited qualifications and uncertain prospects. Nine of these eleven young people were living in independent or semi-independent accommodation (including Riley, in supported lodgings); Elliott's placement status was unknown and Luis remained in foster care with his younger sister, but would require adult social care services. The less settled and academically successful young people in the study tended to be less forthcoming or less articulate in interview, so it was more difficult to assess aspects of resilient adaptation such as their sense of

personal agency and good peer relationships. However, seven of these eleven young people experienced placement breakdowns during or shortly before the start of the study and eight had been excluded from school or college or dropped out. Six of the young people (Gilroy, Habib, Niall, Priya, Qadira and Unity) had suffered recent disruption in both care and educational domains. Only Farouk maintained stability in care and education – and he chose to leave his placement to live with his brother at eighteen, and missed Year 12 as a result of exclusion from college because of his immigration status. Callum had a very difficult placement history and was fortunate to have been able to remain in a supportive school environment, where the designated teacher had provided a stable and supportive adult figure in a pastoral role since Year 7.

The literature suggests that young women may be more likely to achieve better outcomes from care and more resilient adaptations generally (McGloin and Widom, 2001; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007). Although the participant group comprised twelve young men and nine young women, six of the nine classified as 'Moving On' were young women and the remaining three young women were accessed through a specialist charity providing supported housing to care leavers from sixteen to eighteen. Only three of the young men appeared to be well-placed to progress to independence and it is possible that Michael's Asperger's Syndrome might require ongoing support into adulthood, leaving only Adam and Bashir in this group.

When asked who knew about their care status in school, four of the girls (Imogen, Jacinda, Kayla and Tasmin) all referred to 'best' or 'close' friends, indicating strong close peer relationships. Four girls (Devora, Jacinda, Kayla and Tasmin) were also the young people with the closest relationships with their carers. In interview, the young women tended to be better able to explain their motivations and feelings and on the whole appeared more mature. However, the four girls in the first group above all entered care while of primary-school age, and the girls as a whole fell into three clear groups: early entrants (Moving On), comprising Imogen, Jacinda, Kayla and Tasmin; late entrants (Surviving/Struggling), made up of Priya, Qadira and Unity; and those with no-one holding parental responsibility (Moving On), namely Devora and Sofia.

In respect of the young men, the picture is more complex. The two young men who entered care aged thirteen or over (Niall and Riley) were both NEET, and categorised as Struggling and Surviving respectively. Of the two, Riley exhibited a much greater sense of agency, with clear plans for the future, including contingency arrangements,

and seemingly a stable and supportive, if somewhat short-term, relationship with his landlords. Four of the young men entered care in Years 7 or 8 (Bashir, Callum, Farouk and Gilroy), of which Gilroy was NEET at the end of the study and only Bashir is classified as Moving On. The remaining five (Adam, Elliott, Habib, Luis and Michael, as well as Ollie) entered care before reaching secondary school age, but of these, only Adam and Michael are classified as Moving On and Elliott dropped out of college and became NEET. Of the three refugee or asylum-seeking young men, Bashir was doing well, but Farouk had left his carers and Habib's placement had broken down, and Farouk and Habib both had limited academic qualifications.

As set out in section 4.3.3, black and ethnic minority young people were over-represented in the group, of whom nine were white, four Asian, three black, and four mixed race (black), with one (Luis) mixed race (other). However, there has been no discernible pattern in outcomes to date by ethnicity, with the Moving On group comprising four white young people, one Asian, two black and two mixed race. The three most vulnerable girls (Priya, Qadira and Unity) were Asian, black, and white respectively and the young men most at risk of social exclusion were Niall (white) and probably Callum (white). This suggests that Fineman's analysis of the way in which institutions may operate to reproduce power or disadvantage (Fineman, 2008) may in some respects be a more fruitful approach in seeking to understand care leavers' life trajectories than a focus on young people's individual characteristics such as ethnicity. The following section considers the role of corporate parenting arrangements in the development and influence of young people's self-reliance.

7.3.2 ***Self-reliance***

One of the key factors in Stein's categorisation relates to the extent to which young people were able to take advantage of support (Moving On), regarded themselves as self-reliant (Survivors), or were alienated from or by professional support (Strugglers). The extent to which young people saw themselves as self-sufficient is reported in Chapter 5, but there are two issues related to this that stood out in this study, which may be related to one another and which would benefit from more detailed consideration. The first of these is the nature and availability of adult support from young people's perspectives and the second is the tendency for young people to reject

the opportunity to remain in foster placements once they left school or turned eighteen, in favour of living independently.

Section 3.3 included a brief review of the coping and resilience literature concerned with the 'critical' role of social support and evidence that, for adolescents, the family plays the most important role in buffering young people from stress (Coleman, 2011; Sieffke-Krenke, 2013). For the majority of looked-after children (usually excluding UASC), their birth family is the source of stress rather than of its alleviation, explaining the particular importance of substitute caring adult relationships in their lives, as highlighted by researchers such as Schofield (2001) and Geenen and Powers (2007). Parental responsibility for looked-after young people vests in a corporation, but there are four potential sources of stable supportive adult relationships for this group: foster carers (or staff in residential accommodation), social workers, teachers and informal relationships.

Smith, in a re-evaluation of residential child care, not only highlights the centrality of adult-child relationships in child care but distinguishes relationships with children made by other professionals (such as doctors and teachers) from those made by residential child care workers by virtue of the fact that only for professionals in care settings is the primary task the building of relationships with children (Smith, 2009). This distinction helps explain why teachers from mainstream schools in this study, with the exception of Mr Brown, were not regarded by young people as adults with whom they could build close relationships of trust. This finding should not in any sense be regarded as a criticism of teaching staff. In recent years schools have been seen as a forum in which many of the ills of society can be remedied, in particular those that stem from poor or disadvantaged parenting (see, for example, the Coalition Government's schools white paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (Department for Education, 2010c)). Concurrently, however, there has been an increased focus on raising academic attainment through managerial systems of monitoring and assessment (Gewirtz, 2002), as described in section 6.3. Schools remain hierarchical establishments primarily concerned with educational outcomes. The advantages of the designated teacher for looked-after children post, and of its holder being a senior member of staff have already been outlined, in section 6.2, but such a role is unlikely to be compatible with the relationship-based practice of traditional care work. However, Smith also bemoans the extent to which the centrality of the worker-client relationship in social work has been replaced by outcomes-driven case management approaches, concluding that '[c]are only

becomes meaningful when it is personal' (page 121). A return to relationship-based practice in child protection social work has also been called for by Lonne et al., (2009) and Munro (2011), amongst others.

With the exception of Adam, none of the young people in this study reported close personal relationships with their social workers, as discussed in section 5.3. For the most part, social worker turnover precluded social workers being able to afford consistent supportive guidance to young people within a personal adult-child relationship. There was some evidence that key workers or personal advisers fared better in making meaningful relationships with young people, but in all cases these were short-lived (generally from sixteen to eighteen). Although young people drew on informal relationships such as mentors and non-academic or administrative staff in schools, these appeared primarily to be used in order to contain information about their care status and to avoid the appearance of difference. None of the young people in this study highlighted strong and supportive personal relationships with non-professional adults other than carers, although Ms Olive commented that boys at her school often made strong relationships with their taxi drivers, because they saw them every day. Smith (2009: page 142) considers that many agencies appear to 'actively discourage the establishment of such relationships', a state of affairs that he points out is exacerbated by highly regulated access to children by adults.

Foster carers are the adults in young people's lives who approximate most closely to parental role models and are best placed to provide the supportive adult relationship described above. The correlation between stable, supportive placements and successful outcomes for young people has already been discussed and it is deplorable that so few participants reported being treated as a member of the foster carer's family. Stability of placement in this country is poorer than elsewhere in Europe (Höjer et al., 2008) and urgent attention needs to be given to the recruitment and retention of good quality foster carers (Colton et al., 2008; House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee, 2009). This has been identified as a key research priority area by the Department for Education (Department for Education, 2014a).

As in other studies (Sinclair et al., 2007), the findings of this study suggest that late entry into care is likely to be associated with higher levels of behavioural and social difficulties, requiring more expert care and potentially leading to multiple placement disruption, aggravating young people's difficulties. More puzzling, however, is the

evidence from this study that young people were likely to reject the opportunity to remain in foster placements that had been stable for some years in favour of living independently and this is considered in the next section in the context of current government policy.

7.3.3 ***Staying Put***

This research was carried out before the 'Staying Put' provisions in section 98 of the Children and Families Act 2014 came into force. These provisions are briefly explained in Chapter 2 and set out in Appendix 1.2. The effect of the legislation is that local authorities must now consider the appropriateness of the child 'staying put' with their foster carer at the time of preparation of the pathway plan (that is, ideally soon after the child reaches sixteen); that they must facilitate such an arrangement if both parties wish it and it is 'appropriate'; and that they must support the arrangement until the young person is 21, including through financial support to the former foster carer, unless they consider that the arrangement is not consistent with the young person's welfare. The changes were based on a pilot scheme (Munro et al., 2012), as well as evidence from the US on the economic benefits of allowing young people to remain in foster care longer (Peter et al., 2009). To what extent young people will take advantage of this scheme is as yet unknown, but the evidence of this study suggests that financial remuneration to foster carers is not the only barrier to young people remaining in their placements for longer.

Government statistics include data for accommodation or placement at nineteen for children who were in care at sixteen. Table 7.4 below shows the accommodation of study participants at the end of the study using the government's categories. National data (DfE/NS, 2013c) are given for comparison although the results are not directly comparable, as this study ended when young people were eighteen and many were awaiting permanent independent accommodation (and, of course, the sample is small). Elliott is excluded because his placement was unknown after Year 11 and for a few young people it is assumed: for example, Tasmin is assumed to have remained with her foster carer in Year 13 although that placement was under pressure from her brother's behaviour in Year 12.

Table 7.4: Young people's accommodation status at the end of the study

Accommodation status	Young people	Proportion of group	National data
Independent/ moving straight to independent at end of study	Callum/ Adam, Bashir, Devora	**20%**	**37%**
Semi-independent accommodation at end of study	Habib, Imogen, Niall, Priya, Qadira, Sofia, Unity (all awaiting/applying for independent accommodation)	**35%**	**11%**
Supported lodgings	Riley (applying for independent accommodation)	**5%**	**10%**
Foster care	Jacinda, Kayla, Luis, Michael, [Tasmin]	**25%**	**5%**
Custody	Gilroy	**5%**	**3%**
Parents/relatives	Farouk (with brother)	**5%**	**13%**
Care home	Ollie	**5%**	**5%**
[Other/emergency/not in touch]			**[16%]**

From these figures it can be seen that the young people with the most promising future prospects are either likely to move directly from their carers to independence (Adam, Bashir and Devora) or to remain with their carers for some time post-eighteen (Jacinda, Kayla, Michael and perhaps Tasmin). Of the two remaining young people categorised as 'Moving On', Imogen's placement had broken down at seventeen and Sofia's placement history was unclear, but she only arrived in the UK at age fifteen or sixteen. Two key points deserve greater consideration. One is the apparent tendency of young people in this study to elect to move into independent accommodation rather than remain with their carers post-eighteen, and the other relates to the fact that the Staying Put provisions are unlikely to assist those young people already on the edge of social exclusion. Callum, Gilroy, Habib, Imogen, Niall, Priya, Qadira and Unity would not be eligible for Staying Put because their placements broke down before or during the study (in Niall's case, this was an 'on-off' informal placement and his carer's status was eventually revoked). Adam, Bashir, Devora, Farouk and Riley all described good relationships with their carers but indicated that they would opt for independent accommodation in preference to remaining with them (or in Riley's case, in supported

lodgings). Their reasons varied, as discussed in section 5.4. Adam and Devora spoke of financial concerns around getting 'on the [housing] ladder' as soon as possible, while for Bashir, and perhaps also Adam as he got older, there appeared to be a sense that carers were 'not the same' as birth family, however caring they had been. Farouk had left to live with his brother as soon as his immigration status had been resolved. It remains to be seen therefore, to what extent in the current climate, particularly in London, young people will opt to take advantage of the Staying Put legislation.

What is more certain is that the young people most at risk of poor outcomes were in the least stable accommodation. In its current form, the Staying Put initiative, like the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 in relation to educational support, is welcome in providing transitional support for care leavers more closely in line with that of their peers, but also like those provisions, will only be of benefit to young people who are already well-placed to 'move on' in their lives by the time they reach the age of eighteen. Devora explained that she was in the second band for priority allocation of housing in her local authority, the first being people who are terminally ill, and the second care leavers in full-time education. In contrast, Riley, who was not in education, employment or training, had been waiting months for a house, but had recently progressed from band D to band C. Habib had been told that his choice of flat would be dependent on his attendance at college, because flats in the area he had chosen were popular and priority was given to those who could demonstrate a need for proximity to the college. While such policies may incentivize some young people to pursue qualifications, they are likely to disadvantage further the least educated, such as Niall, who was still struggling to read and write at sixteen and at risk of homelessness at eighteen. It remains to be seen whether the recommendation of the House of Commons Education Committee (2014) that the Staying Put provisions be extended to children in residential care homes will be adopted and if so, how effective they will be in extending support to the young people to whom they apply. It is to be hoped, however, that at the least, calls for improved regulation of accommodation for care leavers, including an outright ban on bed and breakfast accommodation, supported by the House of Commons Education Committee (2014), are heeded.

7.4 Reconsidering the role of the state through a foundational rights perspective

There was further evidence in the study of preferential treatment for young people who demonstrated educational success. Some local authorities appeared to provide ongoing qualified social worker support to young people engaging in education but personal advisors to those who were not. Niall's social worker, for example, was about to stop working with him towards the end of the study, because the leaving care team covered sixteen to eighteen year-olds: she had only two young people in her case load over the age of eighteen, and they were both at university. Niall would be transferred to the transitional team, for vulnerable young adults.

For young people with deep-seated problems that have created barriers to their engagement in education and close relationships to their carers, there is arguably something of a policy vacuum. The corporate parent, it appears, bears greater responsibilities for 'good' children who conform to parental expectations than 'troublesome' children who are less credit to their corporate parent. This notion is resonant of Goldson's description of the '"deserving"-"undeserving" schism' (Goldson, 2002) and Fionda's notion of 'devils and angels' (Fionda, 2005), both in the context of youth justice. This seemed also to be reflected in the study in, for example, the personal attention and advice that Virtual Heads offered young people applying to university, perhaps influenced by the inclusion of the percentage of entrants to university from care in national statistics. In this context, the concept of foundational rights draws attention to the way in which such policies can serve to inhibit young people's capacity for 'full' (rather than merely legal) autonomy (Hollingsworth, 2013a) through the state's imposition of discriminatory external conditions on those already hampered by poor internal conditions.

The concept of foundational rights can assist in an analysis of the duties corporate parents should owe to the children in their care in a number of ways. First, its incorporation of the notion of autonomy as relational enables a holistic analysis of the conditions and capacities required for 'full' autonomy. In the context of looked-after children, this helps to elucidate the interdependence of care and educational experiences and outcomes in the lives of looked-after children, and facilitates examination of this interdependence. Second, a foundational rights perspective explains why the most vulnerable young people have the greatest claim to support from their corporate parent,

and justifies prioritising the needs of those most at risk of failing to attain a fully autonomous adulthood. It thereby exposes current policies which tend to reward young people who are doing relatively well as unjust, particularly in the context of the responsibility owed by the state to young people for whose upbringing the state has taken direct responsibility.

It will be recalled from section 3.4.2 that the notion of *reparatory* responsibility reflects the state's duty to redress the harm suffered by children before entering care, or indeed through the care system, while that of *assumed* responsibility explains the state's duty to exercise its responsibilities towards the children in its care in the manner of a responsible parent (Hollingsworth, 2013a). I have used the focal model of adolescence and resilience theory to examine the implications of the state's responsibilities to looked-after children. The focal model of adolescence explains the need for young people to be given adequate time by their corporate parent to tackle the developmental tasks of adolescence as well as addressing the emotional trauma, educational deficits and other issues in their lives and suggests that the more challenges young people face, the more time needs to be accorded to them to address those issues. Resilience theory points to the factors that are likely to assist young people in overcoming the adversity they have experienced, including educational success and the establishment of at least one consistent and caring adult relationship. In the following discussion, I first address the tendency for recent policy initiatives to prioritise or reward 'successful' young people rather than targeting the highest levels of support to the most vulnerable young people. I then argue for a more individual response to young people's needs and consider the barriers to such an approach imposed by the nature of 'corporate parenting'.

7.4.1 ***Corporate parenting and the 'deserving-undeserving' schism***

To an extent, the apparent shift of emphasis to more successful young people reflects the progress that has been made in encouraging high aspirations and in supporting care leavers to fulfil their potential. It is indicative of the relative success of the initiatives of the last fifteen to twenty years and, as such, is cause for celebration. Mr Brook reported a change in focus from young people at risk of becoming NEET to consideration of the need to do more to ensure sure that 'more able' students fulfilled their potential at A level and in higher education, driven by the increasing proportion of looked-after

children in Riversmeet achieving well at GCSE. Ms Ford was 'targeting' children in Year 12 in Wadebridge who had been identified 'as going on to higher education'. Mr Steel recounted taking an individual interest in a young man who appeared to be capable of university entry and described the additional work needed now that more young people were doing well enough to be able to pick and choose post-sixteen courses. This attention in part arose from the fact that social workers and carers may have very little experience of supporting young people aiming at higher education. However, while these scenarios in themselves indicate significant progress for some young people in care, they do not justify less attention and resources being invested in the most disadvantaged.

The accordance of privilege to the more successful looked-after young people was not generally reflected in interviews with participating professionals, but is rather apparent from the wider policy context, from the experiences of young people excluded from mainstream school and/or college, and from accounts of some financially-driven decisions around placement moves. Three possible drivers come to mind, all of which may be influential. The first lies in the imposition of greater managerialism and regulation associated with neoliberal principles. These have led to the 'outcome' driven policies which impose targets and measure success in concrete terms such as the number of GCSEs children attain at grades A*-C. Under such regimes, institutions are perversely led to focus on children at the margins of measurable success, removing attention and resources from those for whom the selected measure is unattainable (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). From an institutional perspective, it is not 'worth' investing in those students, because there is little likelihood of a successful 'return' on that investment for the institution. While local authorities have been judged by the proportion of care leavers who are NEET at nineteen for some time, this is not a target that impacts directly on schools, which are incentivized not to keep low-achieving or poorly-behaved students on roll, and there is now data collected on the number of care leavers progressing to higher education. Such schemes tend only to be sensitive to population-level measures and overlook the needs and characteristics of individuals and again exemplify the reproduction of power or disadvantage by state institutions (Fineman, 2008). These ideas are also associated with marketization principles such as incentivization: the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 are intended to encourage young people to remain in further and higher education. The flaw in this scheme, as identified by the House of Commons Children, Schools and

Families Committee (2009), is that it discriminates against those young people who are ineligible by reason of their limited educational attainment or engagement to access the support it affords, although by definition they are most in need of such support.

The second possibility has its roots in what appears to be a peculiarly Anglophone tendency (Fionda, 2005) to demonise certain subsections of the youth population. Much has been written about the highly artificial distinction between children who are 'troubled' (the domain of social care services, and including children in the care system) and children who are 'troublesome', particularly children in trouble with the law (Goldson and Muncie, 2006), while Broadhurst et al. (2009), among others, point to the way in which New Labour's linkage of rights with responsibilities justified a punitive response to those children and young people - often the most marginalised - exhibiting problematic behaviour. Looked-after children are more likely than their peers in the general population to have been exposed to the risk factors associated with youth offending, including lack of parental support and poor school attendance and they are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system (DfE/NS, 2013c; Kennedy, 2013). In this study, at least four of the young men had been involved with the police and/or implicated in incidents of violence (Callum, Luis, Niall and Riley). Goldson (2000: page 262) described the punitive stance of youth justice policy introduced under New Labour as 'fundamentally antipathetic to the principles of the Children Act 1989' and warned of the risk that it would lead to 'the abrogation of professional responsibilities towards 'children in need", a group he defines broadly, to include care leavers. Thus, there may be an inherent propensity in professional practice towards Goldson's '"deserving"-"undeserving" schism', in which young people regarded as 'troublesome' are deemed unworthy of state support. Application of the notions of the state's reparatory responsibility towards looked-after children and a child's foundational rights to the conditions through which they may achieve 'full' autonomy exposes the falseness, not to say hypocrisy, of such distinctions. Rather than holding such young people to account for their actions at an early age, the concept of foundational rights suggests that the most vulnerable young people should carry less (legal) responsibility for their behaviour, because they are furthest from achieving the conditions needed to exercise 'full' autonomy.

In a consumerist education sector, in which schools compete through league tables of assessment criteria, it would be unsurprising if schools were not acutely aware of the

distinction between 'good' pupils and 'troublesome' pupils. In this study, it was clear from interviews with designated teachers that looked-after children were generally regarded as 'troublesome', and expected to exhibit challenging behaviour. The way in which teachers explained their role demonstrated their understanding of this tendency and also that they readily accepted responsibility to encourage their colleagues to be more understanding of the background circumstances of these children. Designated teachers described the need to 'explain our children to the teachers', as Mr Brown put it, and they spent considerable time and energy advocating against their exclusion.

Those participants that remained in mainstream schools or colleges unquestionably had better prospects than those that did not at the end of the study: all nine of those categorised as 'Moving On' remained in mainstream education throughout the study. Of course it is impossible to demonstrate that mainstream education is primarily responsible for the more promising outlooks for this group, as those excluded from mainstream settings will have been more 'troublesome' (and therefore troubled) on the whole than those who were not. However, excluding Ollie, who was in a special school as a result of his significant disabilities, seven of the twenty young people were excluded from school or college (Gilroy, Habib, Luis, Niall, Qadira, Riley and Unity), in addition to Farouk having been excluded due to his immigration status. This is of particular concern in light of the fact that although statutory guidance on the role of the designated teacher emphasizes the importance of avoiding the exclusion of looked-after children (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009: pages 5-11), more recent statutory guidance for local authorities on promoting the education of looked-after children (Department for Education, 2014c) is weaker (see section 2.3.4). Under the Education Act 2011 section 4, independent appeal panels for the reconsideration of permanent exclusions have been replaced by review panels, which are able to quash the governing body's decision on the basis of the principles applicable to judicial review cases, but not to reinstate the pupil. This may perhaps account in part for the surprisingly high levels of excluded children in this study and the significant energy expended by teachers and virtual heads in attempting to avoid the exclusion of looked-after children. However, a trial of devolvement of responsibility for excluded children to schools undertaken by the Institute of Education and the National Foundation for Educational Research (IoE/NFER, 2014) resulted in fewer permanent exclusions in participating schools. Further, the rates of both permanent and fixed exclusions fell

between 2006/7 and 2012/13 (DfE/NS, 2014c). It is difficult to predict, therefore, the likely future direction of rates of exclusion for looked-after children.

Once children were excluded, designated teachers in non-mainstream settings described a tendency for schools to abdicate responsibility for those children to the alternative setting; Ms Tan went so far as to describe the children she worked with as having been 'put in the bin of life'. Exclusion from school is almost certain to cause considerable disruption in a young person's life, including in their peer relationships and potentially affecting their care placement. The focal model reminds us that imposing such additional challenging life changes on vulnerable young people at critical moments in their educational trajectory is likely to be more than they can successfully negotiate, potentially triggering a downward spiral of challenging behaviour and poor focus on schoolwork described by professional participants. In this study, my strong impression from three interviews with Callum was that, without the extremely understanding response of the school to his acutely challenging behaviour, Callum's prospects would have been extremely poor. The potential impact of recent and forthcoming educational reforms in this area will be discussed further later in the chapter.

The third possible driver for the tendency to prioritise 'good' young people over those regarded as 'troublesome' relates to the concept of 'agency neglect', a term coined in recent years to describe the reluctance of professionals to engage with the most difficult adolescents (Brandon et al., 2008). Such young people are especially challenging to work with or 'hard to help' and require specialist carers and intensive intervention. Engagement in education is not realistic until their lives have been 'sorted out' as Priya put it, or, to use the words of Ms Mason, 'there are all kinds of things that need to go in first before there's going to be any kind of fruitful learning or engagement'. Once again these accounts align with the focal model of adolescence, although the interventions required before a young person can move on in their lives may be therapeutic. These young people have typically experienced a history of loss and rejection coupled with long-term maltreatment (Brandon et al., 2008). Attention to the life circumstances of this very vulnerable group exposes the false dichotomy of the 'troubled' or 'troublesome' child and of the "deserving'-'undeserving' schism'. In the context of looked-after children, the concept of 'agency neglect' draws attention to the deficiencies in the exercise of the parental responsibility that the state holds for this unique group. It also highlights the particular importance of the relational aspects of autonomy

developed by Nussbaum (2003) and Hollingsworth (2013b). The application of foundational rights theory in the context of the focal model of adolescence suggests that the state's duties to looked-after children are heaviest towards those in greatest need of reparation for the state's failure to protect them from parental maltreatment or inadequacies. The next section considers in greater detail how the local authority corporate parent should enact those duties and the challenges in doing so effectively in the arenas of both social care and education.

7.4.2 *Corporate parenting and individual children*

Bullock et al. (2006) conclude that 'the 'state' as an impersonal entity clearly cannot provide the day-to-day care that would normally be taken to constitute 'parenting" (page 1349: see also Bluff et al., 2012). Bullock et al. also point out that the factors predicting success in long-term care placements are similar to those applicable to birth parent families, but that successful outcomes are particularly difficult to achieve for children in long-term foster placements and older children who are likely to be viewed as 'troublesome'. Focusing on relational interpretations of capabilities and/or the relational aspects of autonomy reinforces the importance to the child of the corporate parent having a human face (see, for example, the experiences of care leavers at university reported in Jackson et al., 2005). For the vast majority of children, parental responsibility vests in at least one and probably two adults, usually the child's birth parents. The adult who makes day-to-day decisions with or on behalf of the child is also the person who cares most for and about them and with whom they have the closest relationship. In the case of looked-after children, parental responsibility vests in the elected members and council officers of the local authority. The Children Act 2004 brought together children's social care services (previously included with adult social care) and local authority education services into children's services authorities or departments and required local authorities to appoint a 'director of children's services' (section 18) and a 'lead member for children's services' (section 19). Although some have restructured again since the relaxation of some structural requirements, most local authorities now have a corporate parenting board or group and some have established 'multi-agency looked after partnerships' (Hart and Williams, 2013). However in 2011, Ofsted (2011) concluded that '[t]oo many local authorities…lacked a robust strategy for corporate parenting' (page 148) and that corporate parenting boards in some areas were

still in the early stages of development. In the most recent Ofsted report on social care (Ofsted, 2013a), Ofsted also expressed concern that 32 per cent of local authorities had experienced one or more changes in the identity of the director of children's services over the year covered by the report. In this study, the virtual head of Stonycross, Ms Mason, reported a 'massive changeover of senior managers', so that all the people who set up the virtual school had left, leaving staff very uncertain as to the future of the virtual school itself.

The number of children for whom an English corporate parent is responsible varies widely from none in the Isles of Scilly to 1,890 in Birmingham, and in London from five in the City of London to 565 in Southwark (DfE/NS, 2013b), giving some corporate parents responsibility for an exceptionally large and diverse 'family'. Ofsted (2013a) concluded that 'overall trends of improvement mask failings for individual children' (page 6). Inspection in future will be concerned to track the progress of individual children, reflecting the direction of travel advocated by (Munro, 2011) in her review of child protection. The question therefore, is whether, and if so how, the corporate parenting model can provide children with individually sensitive and responsive exercise of parental responsibility and with a consistent and caring relationship with a supportive adult or whether, in reality, effective parental responsibility can only be exercised by an individual adult with a close and caring relationship with the child.

In the early help assessment model adopted after the Munro review and incorporated in *Working Together 2013* (HM Government, 2013c), a lead professional is appointed to manage co-ordinated assessment and support for families, and a similar model governs the development and delivery of child protection plans. Both of these processes are likely to be relatively short-term interventions and the child usually remains at home with their family throughout. The challenges in relation to assuring consistency and personal attention and care to the needs of looked-after children throughout their childhood are significantly greater, but there have been a number of policy initiatives in recent years to attempt to address them, including the introduction of Independent Reviewing Officers and the recent devolution of decision-making to carers.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) were introduced by section 118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 to chair looked-after child review meetings in order to

ensure that care plans were effectively implemented and they were given power to refer cases in which the care plan had not been adequately followed to the Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass) with a view to an appropriate application being made to the court, for example for discharge of the care order. This scheme appeared however to be ineffective (Fortin, 2009) and the responsibilities of Independent Reviewing Officers to monitor the implementation of care plans were strengthened through the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and The Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. Statutory guidance (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010a) was also introduced in 2010 and IROs are required now to monitor the general performance of the corporate parent and alert senior managers to inadequate practice in the care of children and management of case planning. The IRO role, however, remains that of an officer of the local authority, and in its response to the Family Justice Review Interim Report (Family Justice Review Panel, 2011), the National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) expressed concern that some IROs report being 'encouraged to tone down or suppress concerns they have about local authority plans and practice' (Fayle, 2011: page 4). Ofsted, too, have concluded that the role is underdeveloped and that IROs need to be supported to challenge corporate parenting in order to drive improvement in practice (Ofsted, 2013b).

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 section 11 makes provision for post-holders to be employed independently of the local authority. The provision is not yet in force and is in any event subject to a 'sunset clause' in section 14, under which it will cease to have effect if no order has been made within seven years of the passing of the Act itself in November 2008. The House of Lords Select Committee on Adoption Legislation (2013) has recommended that this provision be implemented, but the government appears resistant to these suggestions (HM Government, 2013b). Most recently, research by the National Children's Bureau (Jelicic et al., 2014) in four local authority areas has found variable performance. The findings highlight the importance of IROs building meaningful relationships with children in order to advocate for them, but some children felt that there was no point in informing their IRO of their wishes and feelings as they would not be acted upon. The recommendations of young people contributing to the research make salutary reading and include: 'IROs should not judge CYP [children and young people] and they should leave any personal feelings out of the situation. Care leavers are <u>not</u> typical young people and require more understanding and

patience from professionals' (page 97). Many young people appear only to have contact with their IRO at the time of their six-monthly reviews (Jelicic et al., 2014: page 46). In my own study, young people rarely mentioned their IROs and none appeared to regard them as of particular significance. The IRO role may, therefore, have as yet unrealised potential to improve corporate parenting practice but does not currently appear to be a realistic means through which both of the dual aspects of parenting – which might loosely be categorised as responsibility and care – might be embodied.

As set out in section 3.4.1, regulations have recently been amended to require the delegation of day-to-day decisions to foster carers or residential care workers (taking into account the child's views and respecting their own decision-making capacity) and to ensure that carers are treated in the same way as birth parents for the purposes of information-sharing and consent to participation in school activities. These changes are welcome and may alleviate many of the frustrations surrounding delayed approval of plans described by young people in this study and perhaps enhance children's sense of family belonging. However, in themselves they cannot address the strategic failings in corporate parenting that currently lead to poor placements, multiple moves or placements far from the child's home area, and nor will they materially assist young people who do not have a good relationship with their foster carer. Further, where parental responsibility and care are separated, children and carers are likely to continue to be subjected to the intrusive surveillance described by participants in this study such as Tasmin and it is less likely that decisions will be taken with a full understanding of an individual child's wishes and feelings.

Where young people have strong and enduring relationships with their foster carers, such as that enjoyed by Jacinda in this study, perhaps greater consideration could be given to the use of Special Guardianship orders. Under section 14A(5)(d), local authority foster carers can apply for a Special Guardianship order in relation to a child who has lived with them for at least a year preceding the application. The special guardian obtains parental responsibility through the order (section 14C(1)(a)) and may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of that of others (section 14C(1)(b)), but (contrary to the position in relation to adoption) the birth parents do not lose parental responsibility. In this study Devora's carer obtained a Special Guardianship order for Devora, but she is Devora's cousin. Early indications were that there is little use of this provision by stranger foster carers (Hall, 2008). This is likely to be primarily for financial

reasons, as although the local authority is required to provide support services under section 14F and section 14G, special guardians are not remunerated for their services in the same way that foster carers are. This option would be of interest only to a limited group of foster carers, therefore, such as Michael's carers, who would have adopted him had it not been for the loss of social services support had they done so. Nonetheless, special guardianship might be attractive to carers in similar circumstances but where adoption would not be appropriate, most likely where children are older. In the recent case of *Re S* [2014], Mrs Justice Pauffley suggested that foster carers consider applying for a special guardianship order for a child of ten whose mother had been refused a visa to enter the UK.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 section 19 introduces a 'named person service', in which an identified individual employed by the local authority (such as a teacher) is to be available to all children of school age to advise, inform and support the child or their parent. There are similar provisions for pre-school children in relation to employees of the health service such as health visitors. Although the difficulties inherent in the designated teacher role have been explored in this thesis, the named person role is a wider one in terms of advice and support extending across all areas of a child's life. If all children were given access to a named professional in this way, there would be less stigma for looked-after children in taking advantage of their role, which could be more intensive in relation to more vulnerable groups of children. Alternatively, social workers could be appointed to schools to fulfil a similar named person role, which would bring a number of advantages. First, social workers within schools would provide a bridge between social care and education services within the local authority and enhance multi-agency working with respect to child protection and safeguarding concerns and referrals as well as for children in state care. Second, embedding social work as a more generic service would help to lift the stigma associated with receipt of social care services which has blighted safeguarding work in this country for so many years. Third, if the social worker allocated to their case was based in the school of a looked-after child, he or she would be more readily available and have greater opportunities to interact outside statutory review requirements, which tended to be experienced by young people in this study as serving the needs of the corporate parent rather than the child. If embedded in schools, such a role would be likely to be more stable than those within local authority children's social care teams in the current environment. Another possible model would be based on the guardian model for

unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, for which professionals are employed in Scotland and volunteers in Norway. Guardians help young people new to the host country negotiate all aspects of their new lives, including legal advice for asylum application, accommodation and education and liaise with services on their behalf. The Government is currently trialling independent advocates for trafficked children.

It is also imperative that young people are provided with a social worker who has the time and skills to be able to develop a meaningful relationship with the young person and is a consistent figure in their lives over time. This has been the Achilles heel of the English care system for too long. Following the Munro review (2011), attention has been paid to strengthening social work training, including through specific incorporation of the skills and capabilities required for child and family social work into professional training (Department for Education, 2011). Munro also exhorted a return to relationship-based practice in social work, which had reputedly become more and more desk-bound with the introduction of case management processes. However, the child and family social work profession remains afflicted by a long-term shortage in supply; high turnover and short professional life; low morale; perceived high case loads and excessive paperwork; and limited opportunities for promotion at the front-line (Holmes et al., 2013).

Children's Services Authorities/Departments cover both education and social care responsibilities. Some of the educational strategies addressed in this thesis may to some extent help to alleviate deficiencies in young people's care. Yet in the educational arena, the corporate parent may have potentially conflicting responsibilities to the children in its education system who are not in care and those for whom it has direct parental responsibility. The numbers of looked-after children in many individual schools are low, making this group less likely to be a priority for head-teachers. The next section considers the way in which recent and forthcoming developments in educational policy have affected or are likely to impact on the educational experiences and attainment of children in care and care leavers.

7.5 **Corporate parenting and education**

The diversity of experiences and needs amongst looked-after young people makes it difficult to make generalisations about the effect of education policy on the cohort as a

whole. Consistent with the argument above that young people are unique individuals requiring the personal guidance and care of adults who know and understand them, this section focuses on the extent to which recent policy developments enable professionals and the education estate to understand and respond sensitively to young people's particular circumstances in order to support their education and promote their educational attainment.

7.5.1 *The role of the designated teacher*

The elevation of the role of designated teacher for looked-after children to a statutory footing has guaranteed a single point of responsibility for this cohort at a senior level within the school. The designated teachers in mainstream schools in this study played a key role in managing the tensions arising from young people's pastoral needs spilling over into the school environment in a climate of pressure on schools to maintain high standards of attainment and behaviour. It appears that ensuring the role is held at a senior level within the school may allow the holder to be an effective advocate for those young people who do not always find it easy to conform to behavioural expectations or focus on their studies. Many examples of effective intervention within school by designated teachers were apparent, the most striking being in relation to 'fighting' for young people not to be excluded, as described in section 6.2.2. The study also found evidence of the value of the role in managing information-sharing within and beyond the school and in petitioning Children's Services on behalf of children, for example where disruptive placement moves were planned, either directly or through the local authority virtual head. The external-facing aspect of the designated teacher role may be particularly important where social work staff are transient and/or have limited contact with young people.

However, the high number of young people participating in the study who had been excluded from school or college suggests that professional participants in the study may have been unusually motivated and confident in advocating on behalf of children. This tentative finding is reinforced by Mr Brook's comment that some designated teachers are 'struggling to find their voice in schools' and Mr Steel's acknowledgment of high numbers of looked-after children from Ironbridge in Pupil Referral Units. The seniority of designated teachers within the school hierarchy was seen as important by designated teachers and virtual heads, not just at an individual level, but to ensure the needs of such young people are addressed at a strategic level as well. Calvert (2009) describes the

development of pastoral care within schools from a position of low status to one in which it has been explicitly linked to learning and in which non-teachers undertake roles that are central to child well-being. The designated teacher post appears to fit neatly into this trajectory in the prioritisation of educational attainment in the functions of the role. However, teachers who are ambitious for their own career progression may find it difficult to reconcile their commitment to meeting the school's performance management targets with their responsibility to protect the broader best interests of looked-after children.

Other potential disadvantages of the designated teacher post being held at a high level of seniority in the school are evident from the study. The professional identity of teachers and the hierarchical structure of schools is very different from the ethos of social care, and the more senior the teacher, the more difficult and perhaps inappropriate it may be for a teacher to be involved directly in pastoral care. In some cases young people's aspirations and plans were not known to designated teachers, who had made assumptions about their appropriate career trajectories based on their academic potential rather than their personal interests. Young people were extremely reluctant to be treated differently from their peers in any way, and could feel oppressively monitored or singled out, in keeping with Power's finding (1996) that pastoral care mechanisms in school may become a vehicle for control and surveillance.

For the most part, therefore, young people had little to do with their designated teachers, beyond fulfilling what they saw as largely administrative requirements imposed by Personal Education Plan review meetings. The exception to this model in mainstream schools was Mr Brown, who was semi-retired and held a non-teaching role. He was clearly someone in whom young people were readily able to confide. In general, therefore, this study supports the suggestion of Fletcher-Campbell (2008) that the different aspects of the designated teacher role might best be undertaken by more than one member of staff within the school. In all schools, much investment had been made to increase the pastoral support to such young people through social workers, pastoral leaders or mentors. However concern was expressed by participants that these models may be difficult to sustain in the current policy environment, and one school had already been informed that its social work post was to be cut.

It is possible that the tensions recounted above might be less acute in an educational environment less preoccupied with attainment outcomes, where all children are

accepted as members of the school community and schools are under less pressure to remove poorly-performing or disruptive children from their roll. Ms Gold's discomfort with the emphasis of the statutory guidance on promoting high expectations – that 'it should be the same for everyone' – is founded on a concern that the ethos of schools should ensure that *all* children are equally valued and supported in order to achieve in line with their personal potential. It is apparent that the school environment has enormous potential to provide support through the consistent rhythm of school life and the young person's sense of 'attachment' to the school community (if established), but relationships with teachers cannot be expected to compensate for deficiencies in those with social workers or carers.

A weakness of the designated teacher role apparent from this study was the limited extent to which schools were directly involved in young people's transition to college at sixteen, which was regarded as the preserve of the leaving care team and was also hampered by poor or non-existent relationships between schools and further education colleges. This is an area which might be significantly strengthened by: focused oversight by virtual heads (discussed below); development of arrangements for care leavers at further education colleges; and adoption of some of the strategies used by head-teachers in non-mainstream settings in this study.

As set out in section 4.3.4.1, there was usually no recognised role of designated teacher in the non-mainstream settings, which were for the most part very small, and responsibility for looked-after children (who often comprised a high proportion of the school's population) lay with the head teacher. All five participants working in non-mainstream settings therefore had considerable expertise in responding to the needs of looked-after children but tended not to see them as a discrete group because all member of the school had unique needs. In some ways this was an advantage in that all children were regarded as individuals and none felt singled out within that environment. However, with the exception of Ms Coral, there was little engagement with the local Virtual School, seemingly for a variety of reasons, including that the school was independent or because engagement with social services was primarily through the Special Educational Needs service. Establishing robust links between virtual schools and designated or named teachers in alternative provision should be a first step to ensuring that individual attention is given to planning the educational progression of young people out of mainstream school. On the evidence from Forest Hill College,

similar arrangements with senior members of staff at further education colleges have the potential to improve retention rates at college.

7.5.2 *The introduction of virtual school head-teachers*

This study was conducted at a time when the population of children in care was continuing to rise following the impact of the Peter Connelly case (DfE/NS, 2011a), yet local authorities were suffering from ongoing austerity measures which disproportionately affected children's social care, especially in authorities with high numbers of looked-after children (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, 2011). In accordance with the findings of Ofsted (2012a) in relation to inspections of nine local authorities, professional participants in this study reported significant budget cuts and at least one virtual school was at risk of closure. One participating virtual school had lost its dedicated Year 11 transitions officer in budget cuts, and funding for a project to reduce care leavers who are NEET had run out in another, while in a third, the looked-after children resources and staffing budget had been cut by 50-60 per cent. The introduction of a statutory requirement for local authorities to appoint a Virtual School Head (or analogous post) under the Children Act section 22(3B) to monitor the fulfilment of the local authority's duty to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children is welcome. It should be noted, however, that a single appointment is sufficient to meet the statutory requirement and it was evident from this study that the participating local authorities were extremely stretched. All were part-time in that role, as shown in Table 4.4, and most had other responsibilities, as well as very small teams. Ms Coral said of her local authority virtual school:

> The virtual team were excellent…but they were horrifically understaffed, and at one point it was just the head of the virtual school who was functioning on her own, with one temporary agency member of staff, because she lost one, I think, in the cuts…with some of the children who were seriously at risk she would attend the meetings herself, but she was stretched incredibly thin.

Nonetheless, implementation of this role on a statutory basis recognises the importance of education in improving the prospects of looked-after children. An evaluation of the impact of virtual schools on the educational progress of looked-after children in nine local authorities by Ofsted (2012a) found the model to be valuable in ensuring that educational considerations are given core attention in case planning and reviews. On the

evidence of this study, virtual school heads are well-placed to co-ordinate work and ensure effective communication between education and social care, particularly in relation to attendance (also highlighted as a strength in the Ofsted report on the impact of virtual schools (2012a) and identified as an area of effective practice in some virtual schools in the Ofsted 2010/11 annual report (Ofsted, 2011)); the avoidance of exclusion (an area regarded as an issue for less successful virtual schools in the Ofsted annual report of 2011, but highlighted as an area of progress attributable to virtual schools in the 2012 report on virtual schools (Ofsted, 2012a); and in transition planning.

Virtual heads in this study acknowledged that this group of children are unlikely to be a priority for head teachers in mainstream schools. Overall, they felt that significant progress had been made since the virtual school system was instituted in the sensitivity with which schools responded to the needs of looked-after children. A number of strengths common to all the models can be identified, despite the variety of structures. All teams were multi-disciplinary or embedded within a multi-disciplinary structure: that in Wadebridge for example, included an education psychologist as well as members from the SEN team, educational welfare and social care and a head teacher, in order to link up practice across the authority. Virtual schools modelled themselves on school leadership teams and participants stressed that they deliberately mirrored schools also in the way in which looked-after children were monitored ('we now feel that we are a school, and we are tracking our pupils, etc., etc. in the same way that a school would do': Ms Mason). All prioritised monitoring of attendance to ensure that they were informed immediately if children were not in school and collected attainment data on 'their' children regularly. Ms Mason considered that this enabled the virtual school to be much more proactive, rather than primarily responding to crises when brought to them by social workers. The focus was relentlessly on attainment: 'the priority is always trying to raise achievement of young people, that's...how we are measured, both by central, and locally' (Mr Brook); 'the emphasis is about attainment, and outcomes, quite frankly, about what they are going to do when they come out of school' (Ms Lea).

Another common aspect of their role concerned empowering social workers to challenge schools. Virtual heads paid particular attention to ensuring that social workers and foster carers are equipped to act as would educated, knowledgeable parents, including in understanding the system of attainment levels; the complex qualifications available at sixteen and over; and working with further education colleges. Ms Ford

described some of the social workers as feeling 'quite intimidated' by schools, which they felt 'weren't being as cooperative as they could be'. She said 'social workers don't have that confidence…they won't challenge a head teacher'. Social workers and teachers 'don't speak the same language necessarily' (Ms Mason), but as former senior teachers, members of the virtual schools were comfortable communicating in schools and found schools were much more willing to engage with them than with social workers. Ms Ford felt her team had succeeded in 'raising the profile' of looked-after children within schools, and enabling social workers to challenge schools. She also commented that teachers seemed to prefer to approach her with questions rather than social workers.

Current priorities varied amongst the virtual heads, but a common issue raised by virtual schools was that of enabling children to make smooth educational transitions when moving care placements. This was a particular issue where children were placed out of the local authority area, an issue also identified by Ofsted (2012a). The care of children placed outside their 'home' local authority has been an issue of concern in its own right for some years. A recent Ofsted report (Ofsted, 2014) has highlighted deficiencies in the quality of care, information-sharing, direct support for a child's particular needs and contact with their birth family for this group of children. Ms Ford estimated that just over half of 'her' secondary children were in placement out-of-borough, requiring her to travel 'all the way around the country' to meet them. In part, that was because the authority was small and unable to find placements in the local authority area for all children, but in some cases it was a deliberate decision to place the child at some distance from their birth family. Additionally, there were no residential homes in her authority at all, so eight secondary-age children were out-of-borough in specialist schools to meet their particular needs, but she felt they were getting an 'excellent education' because of the specialist nature of the schools. However, this was likely to introduce further complications. Ms Mason commented:

> particularly with statemented pupils…not only are you working with another local authority, but you often have to go through your own SEN department, their SEN department, two lots of complex needs panels… it's a bit of a minefield.

Transition at sixteen-plus was an issue for all virtual schools in the study; as the advisory teacher at Stonycross said: 'we are very aware that sixteen to eighteen is the stage where they can become very disaffected, lose track, and lose focus of those sixteen years'. Stonycross was currently only involved with children up to the age of sixteen, but was

hoping to extend its services post-sixteen. As the NEET figures are a national indicator, someone was employed one day a week to address the prevention of young people becoming NEET elsewhere in the authority, but Ms Mason felt it should be brought into the remit of the virtual school, saying:

> I'm very concerned that we don't have adequate continuity and follow-through...detailed work around where they are going, are there issues…what can we do to support that educational establishment to keep that child, or maybe can we work with them to find something more appropriate so they'll be more engaged, and all of that kind of ongoing work that's kind of just normal bread and butter work in our team… there isn't…anyone in that role, to do that when they go further on. So if things go wrong they just go wrong…we've worked quite a lot to make sure the NEET figures improved, but there's still a lot of gaps from that transition from sixteen, FE.

It is imperative that all virtual schools extend at least to eighteen and preferably to 25, to match the potential obligations under the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. Data management seemed to be a concern post-sixteen however, with Mr Brook commenting that although Riversmeet had a 'strong tradition of hanging on to its young people until they are at least eighteen', the data for older children were less robust than that available in relation to younger children.

A common issue at Stonycross, where about 35 per cent of the looked-after children had SEN statements, was a failure for support to be continued post-sixteen through a Learning Difficulties Assessment:

> a lot of them, when they leave school at Year 11, don't have a Section 139 assessment, so you might get statements finishing but no further support gets identified, and of course that leads to all sorts of problems when they go on to vocational training or college courses… If they were ours we'd be making sure that those all happened, you know.

Although stressing that they operated like a school, virtual heads spoke about the children in their school from a parental perspective. Ms Mason, for example, commented on the complexities of placing children out of area, saying: 'because we are the parent, we would like our children to be dealt with in a particular way, but there's no way through that sometimes'. All virtual heads appeared to take a very personal interest in 'their' children, including attending personal education plan meetings where appropriate, organising achievement or celebration days and offering personal guidance to young people considering application to university. Ms Ford at Wadebridge had

taken over all Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings in order to get to know the children personally, raise the profile of the virtual school within schools and ensure appropriate support was in place. She did not think that would be sustainable in the long-term, but in the short-term it enabled her to make relationships with schools and children and challenge schools directly. She also planned to accompany the current Year 12 students to university interviews if it was needed, although commented that often the foster carers were very good at doing that.

The virtual school system appears to offer a good opportunity for the local authority to present a human face to looked-after children and to provide some of the personal care and individual attention that young people need. The 'Care to Work' model at Wadebridge described in section 7.2.2, taking a holistic approach to all aspects of a young person's life and incorporating the 'Grow our Own' group offering work experience within the authority itself, demonstrates the potential for local authorities to take a more 'hands on' approach to corporate parenting. Wadebridge virtual school had also taken over responsibility for recommending and authorising administration of the pupil premium, which is currently allocated to the school and not ring-fenced, to ensure that it was spent on the individual needs of each child. As a result, it had been used for activities such as horse-riding for a young woman over the summer holidays before she started at equine college to ensure that her riding skills were adequate. In other authorities, it went directly to the school, but Stonycross included a section in the PEP to ascertain how the money had been used for that child. The change in the conditions of grant of the pupil premium so that it will be paid to virtual schools from 2014/15 (Department for Education, 2014d) should enhance the ability of virtual heads to meet the individual needs of looked-after children.

Despite the role of the Virtual Head being placed on a statutory footing, there are well-grounded fears that many schools in the future may not benefit from their services. At the time of the study, all participating virtual schools were still offering their services free to all schools within their local authority, but increasing numbers of schools were becoming academies and free schools were being set up. In Wadebridge, for example, nearly all secondary schools were expected to become academies, while almost all secondary schools were academies in Stonycross. Such schools are independent of local authority control and may choose not to share data with the virtual school or use their support, particularly if in the future local authorities have to charge for such services.

Ms Mason's view was that 'the idea that any schools are going to commission our services is ludicrous…because half the time they haven't got any looked-after children, and…as a head, I know that it wouldn't be, probably, top of my list'.

7.6 **Conclusion**

Ms Oak said of some of the young people she was aware of at Forest Hill College, who still came within the remit of the virtual school at twenty or 21, that 'they are adults, obviously, legally, but they are still young people who haven't got the skills for life yet'. In this chapter I have endeavoured to draw together the threads of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this thesis and the findings from the empirical study in order to examine young people's educational transitions from Year 11 to Year 13 within the context of what it means to achieve 'full' autonomy. There is much to praise in recent initiatives within education that have focused individual attention on young people's educational progress and attainment. Arguably the virtual head role provides a powerful contribution to corporate parenting in this regard. However, two inter-related concerns stand out. The first is that, given the interdependence of the two, there is a risk that progress made in recent years in relation to education for looked-after children may be undermined by less effective social care practice. The second relates to those young people who, at a time when academic attainment for the cohort as a whole appears to be improving, remain in the margins of educational provision and social inclusion. Although it should be noted that three of the girls participating in the study were accessed through a specialist provider of services for care leavers requiring a high level of support, it is concerning that nine of the 21 young participants were excluded from and/or dropped out of, school and/or college. Using Hollingsworth's terminology, arguably this constitutes a failure in the state's exercise of its assumed responsibility for looked-after children.

This study paints a picture of some young people doing extremely well educationally from care and appearing to be well-equipped for adulthood, while others, who may be hard to help or find themselves on the wrong side of the "deserving'-'undeserving' schism', still face a very bleak future. The period covered by this study, particularly for those leaving school at sixteen, is likely to be crucial in shaping their future prospects. It is clear that there is much more that could be done by local authorities and further

education colleges in exercise of the state's reparatory responsibility to support vulnerable young people through this transition and beyond, in fulfilment of young people's foundational rights. The final chapter of the thesis, after summarising the key findings and theoretical contribution of the study, focuses on the implications for policy and practice and makes recommendations for further research.

Chapter 8:

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

It is now a decade since the introduction of New Labour's *Every Child Matters* agenda, which included measures to address the poor educational attainment of looked-after children in response to the report of the Social Exclusion Unit (2003), and in particular the imposition by the Children Act 2004 of a specific duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in their care. Although *Every Child Matters* has been abandoned by the Coalition Government, current political rhetoric nonetheless stresses the role of education in facilitating social mobility. The political focus on the life chances of looked-after children has been maintained, as demonstrated by measures in recent legislation such as the Children and Families Act 2014. Introduction of a statutory role of designated teacher for looked-after children in 2009 and development of the virtual school model provided part of the motivation for this study. The policies of the last decade have resulted in some narrowing of the attainment gap between looked-after children and their peers up to Key Stage 4 (DfE/NS, 2013c), although progress has been described by Jackson (2010: page 57) as 'disappointingly slow'.

Focused attention to the needs of care leavers dates back to the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 but as Jackson points out, there has been a 'strong, and damaging, assumption' that looked-after children will not progress beyond Level 2 qualifications (Jackson, 2010: page 56), at least prior to the introduction in 2009 of increased support for care leavers continuing in education and training through the Children and Young Persons Act 2008. Coinciding with the extension of compulsory education and/or training for all children to the age of eighteen and in the economic context of a global recession which has particularly affected young people in the UK as well as Europe, this study has sought to offer a timely contribution to the limited research base on the education of looked-after young people beyond the age of sixteen.

The overarching aim of the study was to explore how looked-after young people experience educational transitions in Years 11-13 and how these transitions might best be supported. During this period children are required to make significant decisions about their future at sixteen-plus and beyond the age of eighteen, and to date this has been a relatively neglected area of research, perhaps because care leavers have not traditionally been expected to progress beyond Key Stage 4. A longitudinal qualitative design was chosen in order to shed light on the individual experiences of young people over time and the trajectories that are triggered by their attainment and choices at the age of sixteen. The impact of children's pre- and in-care experiences on their educational trajectories is such that young people's education can only be considered within the broader context of their personal histories. The time under consideration in the study is also one during which young people in care experience significant transitions in other areas of their lives. For these reasons considerable attention has been paid in the thesis to young people's care experiences as well as their educational progress and Coleman's focal theory of adolescence has been utilized to underpin consideration of the interdependence of young people's care and educational transitions. I have positioned this scrutiny in the context of the notion of 'corporate parenting' because it is the corporate parent which holds ultimate responsibility for all aspects of the care of looked-after children. My concern as a former practitioner, as a children's rights advocate, and indeed as a parent, lies with the care and upbringing of each *individual* child, a concern which mirrors that of the Munro review in relation to child protection (Munro, 2011). There are obvious challenges in vesting responsibility for a large number of diverse individuals at an institutional level, which arguably may be exacerbated by policies which measure institutional performance at the macro level of population statistics.

I have argued in this thesis that a rights-based analysis is best placed to consider how well-equipped individual young people are to exercise autonomy in adulthood. Over the course of this study the young participants approached legal adulthood and were at a stage of their lives when their capability to exercise autonomy and the extent to which they were permitted or enabled to do so increased rapidly. Young people's own perspectives have therefore been foregrounded in the analysis in order to avoid the potential pitfalls associated with relying on the interpretation of professionals or other adults as to what is considered to be in a child's best interests or what a young person plans for their future. I have drawn upon Hollingsworth's theory of 'foundational rights'

to present a richer understanding of the conditions required for the exercise of 'full' autonomy, including relational as well as material aspects. I have drawn also on resilience theory, because it recognises young people's agency, focuses on their strengths and potential rather than their vulnerability and circumstances, and is able to accommodate complexity and individual difference.

The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To explore the key barriers to academic progress for looked-after young people at and beyond Key Stage 4 and how looked-after young people experience and navigate these barriers;
2. To consider the interdependence of young people's experiences in and before entering care and their educational outcomes in order better to understand the most effective means by which young people may be supported to reach their educational potential;
3. To assess the effectiveness of the virtual school head and designated teacher roles in promoting the engagement and progress of looked-after young people in further education and their participation in higher education; and
4. Critically to examine the current legislative and policy environment in the light of the findings from the study with a view to identifying how young people transitioning out of care might best be supported to fulfil their educational potential.

In this final chapter of the thesis I review the key findings of the study and evaluate its contribution to the empirical research literature and to theoretical framings of the responsibilities of the state to the children for whom it has adopted responsibility, particularly as they approach and attain legal adulthood. I assess the implications of the findings for legislation, policy and practice affecting this small cohort of disadvantaged young people who have a particular claim on the state to safeguard and promote their welfare. I then consider fruitful directions for further research in this area and assess the limitations of the study in order to provide a holistic evaluation of the research project.

8.2 **The key findings arising from the study**

It is reassuring that of the seventeen young people who participated in Year 12, all considered that being in care had improved their educational outcomes and

opportunities and all but Imogen were clear that removal from their parents' care was the right decision for them. For a number of participants (particularly Riley, who was very clear in his view), it is likely that entry into care at an earlier age would have reduced the disadvantages they faced upon entry and enhanced their prospects as they approached adulthood. It is, however, concerning that Imogen did not understand why she had been removed from the care of her birth family or consider that it had been necessary for her welfare. The most significant findings in relation to young people's educational progress are reviewed briefly below, followed by consideration of the implications of the findings relating to young people's care experiences for their educational experiences and outcomes.

8.2.1 *From 'low expectations' to 'pushy parents'?*

Contrary to earlier literature suggesting that professionals and carers held unacceptably low expectations of looked-after children's educational potential (Ofsted/SSI 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), this study suggests that the reforms of the last decade have served to ensure that education is high on the agenda for most teachers, social workers and carers. It is also clear that young people themselves placed a high value on education and were acutely aware of the significance of qualifications in the adult world they were about to enter. Virtual heads, designated teachers and young people all appeared to accord particular status to entry to university and, from the evidence of young people such as Jacinda, this was clearly the case in relation to some carers as well. If the proportion of young people with a realistic ambition to attend university in this study is an accurate reflection of the wider care population, then we can expect an increase in university entrants from a care background in the next few years, which would indicate significant progress. However, the study also suggests that measurement of local authorities' success in terms of numbers of university entrance may serve not only to divert attention from those who are in danger of 'falling out of everything' (Mr Brook) in favour of the most educationally 'successful' young people, but may also result in a tendency for schools to promote unrealistic expectations, resulting in inevitable disappointment and the need for young people to be 'let down gently' (Mr Brown). These issues do, of course, apply more widely to the general population and appear to reflect a culture in which vocational courses are regarded as inferior to more 'academic' studies. A more detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, but is a highly topical one in light of the current attempts to scale up and to regulate

apprenticeship-based learning. A focus on the individual needs and aspirations of young people in place of a 'one-size-fits-all' measure of success is key to enhancing young people's future prospects in a way which respects their chosen life course rather than serves the evaluation needs of their corporate parent. The potential conflict between the political pressures on corporate parents and their duties to the individual young people for whom they hold responsibility is a theme that has permeated this study and is reviewed further in other contexts below.

8.2.2. *Incentivising attainment or punishing vulnerability?*

A pernicious effect of some of the current policy drivers lies in the way in which the most vulnerable young people – often conceptualised as the most troublesome – are afforded the least support. Systems which measure outcomes by the proportion of children attaining certain target grades (such as 5A*-Cs at GCSE) inevitably incentivise work with those within reach of the target and render assistance to those who cannot attain that standard within the available timeframe less worthy of professional investment. The specific provisions applicable to care leavers exacerbate this general problem by privileging the most successful. The additional support provided through the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 to young people who continue in education is welcome and timely. However, criticism by the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009), that the extension of the personal advisor scheme to 25 only for those pursuing education or training discriminates against the most vulnerable, is a valid and important one. Young people continuing in education are also incentivized by the award of bursaries. There is evidence from this study that educationally successful young people may be privileged in other ways, such as through the continued support of social workers being available only to prospective university students and by the linking of priority for available accommodation to college attendance. Such measures serve to reinforce the distinction Goldson (2002) calls the 'deserving-undeserving schism' and are likely to result in a polarising of outcomes at the individual level, where high-achievers are lauded and supported and young people who are struggling, such as Niall, are further marginalised and stigmatised. This is reflected in Tables 7.1-7.3, in which young people are designated into Stein's categories of 'Moving On', 'Survivors' and 'Strugglers' (Stein, 2012). This conclusion has recently been endorsed by the findings of a survey of 100 care leavers by the Centre for Social Justice (2014), which concluded that despite genuine advances for care leavers in general, the

'vast majority of spending and support' has been targeted at 'better-off' young people, primarily those with more stable care experiences and who remain in education, at cost to those with the least stable placements and who are least likely to continue their education (pages 4-5).

8.2.3 *The sixteen-plus transition*

Decisions that young people make about their educational and career pathways post-sixteen are critical ones for their future prospects and again this transition was one that was much smoother and easier for young people already doing well. This may be in part because looked-after young people are entitled to preferential treatment in schools admissions processes and are thereby able to access schools with good academic results. Such schools are likely to have selection criteria for entry to their sixth forms, enabling only those who perform well at GCSE to continue to eighteen. For those who do not meet the entry criteria to remain in their Key Stage 4 school, or who choose to transfer to college, it appears that this transition is often problematic. The decision as to whether young people will be best served by remaining in school or moving to college is very much an individual one. However, there are clear advantages for this cohort in remaining in a familiar and supportive environment, particularly in the context of the concurrent care transitions which young people are likely to be negotiating, including moving to the leaving care team and for some, changes in placements which may involve returning to their 'home' local authority and/or moving to live semi-independently.

Limited support and flexibility at further education colleges appear on the evidence of this study to exacerbate the challenges faced by young people in settling at college. It is clear, however, that many young people in care have not realised their academic potential by the end of Key Stage 4 and it is imperative that young people are afforded a 'second chance' to make up any educational deficit they carry as a consequence of their pre-care and/or in-care experiences beyond the age of sixteen. Government policy aimed at ensuring that young people lacking basic skills are required to study maths and English beyond Key Stage 4 appears sensible. However, current policy discourages schools from offering a broad-based curriculum in a comprehensive sixth-form. There may be a risk that compulsory education or training to the age of eighteen will exacerbate the development of a two-tier system, in which further education colleges

serve young people taking vocational routes, which are considered to be of lower status, and school sixth-forms focus on higher status, more academic pathways (see e.g Ainley, 2013; Meschi et al., 2014). Consideration should be given to allowing care leavers priority admission to the college of their choice, to minimise further disruption and ensure that they are able to access high quality educational provision and a supportive environment. It appears that there may be considerable scope in some local authorities for improvement of retention rates for care leavers attending further education colleges through greater collaboration between virtual schools and designated staff in colleges.

8.2.4 *The role of the designated teacher*

Schools and colleges face a difficult balancing act in supporting older looked-after children. This research highlights two key tensions. The first, of which mention has already been made above, relates to the inherent conflict between pressure on institutions to demonstrate high levels of academic attainment by pupils in a competitive educational 'market' and the pastoral needs of young people with disrupted care and educational histories who are likely to present with significant behavioural difficulties and for the most part less likely to contribute to the perceived success of the institution. Although the use of senior members of staff in the post of designated teacher has the potential advantage of providing a powerful advocate for looked-after children within the school environment, this conflict may be particularly acute for professionals who are ambitious to progress in their career, who may feel reluctant to challenge their head teacher. While professional participants in this study all demonstrated an admirably robust approach to their advocacy role, it is clear from the high proportion of young people participating in the study who had been excluded from mainstream school that not all schools honour the expectations that exclusion is an absolute last resort for looked-after children and that schools continue to support excluded young people to return to school thereafter.

Further, where the post-holder is a member of the senior management team it is inevitable that young people will perceive them as less approachable and may avoid contact as much as possible, as being likely to draw attention to their status within school. The model in this study used by Fairfields School, of an experienced, senior and highly respected but semi-retired member of staff with no further ambitions and with an exclusively pastoral role in the school appeared to be particularly successful. Other

schools had made creative use of administrative staff such as attendance officers but post-holders in such roles are unlikely to be able to offer the authority of more senior members of staff and add an additional layer of communication.

The second tension arises from the interdependence of care and education (Berridge, 2007; Jackson, 2010). The importance of school in providing a normalising environment in which children can detach themselves from their looked-after status (Gilligan, 2000; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Newman, 2004; Cameron, 2007) should not be underestimated, but may be undermined by an overemphasis on children's social care status within school. Young people identify a need for consistent and trusted sources of support and continue to report that these are rarely accessed through social services. Designated teachers may provide looked-after children with a consistent professional to advise and support them in their educational career, but teachers cannot – and should not – substitute for professional social workers.

This study suggests that while designated teachers appear to be a valuable resource in many respects, the management of young people's transitions to other institutions at sixteen-plus may be a weakness. In some instances this appeared to be associated with young people's move to the leaving care team and a perception by designated teachers that arrangements were the concern of that team and not of the school. There was also some evidence to suggest that relations between schools and colleges were perceived as competitive and/or that further education colleges were reluctant to liaise with schools or were otherwise poorly equipped to do so. In some cases providers of alternative provision appeared to be more focused and engaged in actively managing this transition on behalf of young people who needed high levels of support in further education, and mainstream schools might usefully develop similar arrangements.

8.2.5 *The potential effectiveness of the 'virtual head' system*

This study suggests that virtual heads can play a valuable role in enabling local authorities to fulfil their statutory duty to promote the educational attainment of looked-after children. On the evidence presented here, the virtual school model can promote communication and co-operation between social care and education; ensure that the education of looked-after children is given high priority within local authorities and schools; and facilitate the translation of corporate parenting policy into individual attention to the unique needs of young people. A significant advantage of the virtual

school system was evidenced in enhanced communication to schools of the background and needs of new entrants into care. Another benefit was the ability of virtual heads to work constructively with schools, to challenge them and hold them to account, as well as to support social workers to do so (see also Ofsted, 2012a), attributed by participants to their senior status and educational backgrounds. Where their remit extends beyond Key Stage 4, virtual schools may provide invaluable continuity through educational and social care transitions. The placing of the role on a statutory footing by the Children and Families Act 2014 is therefore welcome, but it is important to bear in mind just how modest the statutory requirement is. Virtual school heads in this study worked in very small teams whose members had other responsibilities. Moreover, with the introduction of free schools and the expansion of the academy movement, more schools are gaining greater independence from local authority control. Although virtual heads participating in this study all offered the services of their virtual school free to all schools within their local authority area, it is likely that such a policy will become unsustainable in the near future as services for looked-after children fall under the axe in the 2014-15 budgets of local authorities (McNicoll and Stothart, 2014). This is a particular concern in relation to ensuring that looked-after children are provided with the right school placement for them in a timely fashion, even where the school is full or they have missed the applications round; managing attendance; preventing exclusion where at all possible; arranging for young people who are not able to function successfully in a mainstream school to be given the highest quality alternative placement and prepared for return to mainstream education at the earliest opportunity; and ensuring that excluded young people are not overlooked but that their educational progression is planned and supported as it would be for any other young person.

8.2.6 ***The dependence of educational outcomes on young people's experiences in care***

One of the strongest and most disappointing findings from young people's accounts of their experiences in care is that despite repeated exhortations in the literature for steps to be taken to address the harm arising from high turnover and caseloads of social workers, the young people in my study still reported experiencing poor continuity of social work and were unable to develop meaningful and trusting relationships with the professionals most directly responsible for their welfare. Coupled with the extent to which young people experienced poor quality placements, unhappiness in placements

and/or multiple disruptions in placements, this led to a degree of instability in their personal lives directly associated with their experiences in care. Focal theory helps to account for the way in which young people's educational progress may be easily derailed by disruption in their care, even without taking into account the practical consequences, such as disrupted educational placements, that might result from such events.

Over thirty years ago now, Freeman (1983: page 168) wrote '[t]here is no way in which one can equate flesh and blood parents with legal parents in a care setting', citing in particular bureaucratic decision-making by people unacquainted with the children for whom they are responsible and the prevalence of poorly paid workers in residential care homes. While nearly three-quarters of children are now cared for in foster-placements, it is tempting to conclude that little has changed in children's lived experience of care. Placing greater responsibility for day-to-day decision-making in the hands of foster carers is a welcome development, but there were too few young people in this study who enjoyed a genuinely warm and close relationship with their carers akin to that of family life at its best. This finding may, at least in part, account for the surprising fact that as young people approached eighteen, they became less likely to want to remain in their foster placement, opting instead to live independently, although there appear to be other factors such as financial implications that are also of significance in this regard.

Young people did not refer to long-term informal relationships of the sort identified in the resilience literature (e.g. Newman, 2004; Gilligan, 2008) as valuable during transitions in young people's lives, either spontaneously or in answer to questions about supportive individuals in their lives. Echoing the findings of the Care Inquiry (The Care Inquiry, 2013), this study suggests that there is an urgent need to refocus attention on looked-after young people's personal relationships with significant adults. In particular, consideration needs to be given to how the legal parent of looked-after children can provide the same level of individual care and attention as most children are able to take for granted from their birth parents, discussed in section 8.4 below.

8.3 The theoretical contribution of the study

As Stein (2006b) has pointed out, there has to date been limited use of theoretical frameworks to enhance understanding of the experiences of and outcomes for young

people ageing out of care. Stein himself suggested use of attachment theory, resilience theory and the focal model of adolescence as potential frameworks and this study has drawn upon two of these. As discussed in previous chapters, a resilience framework is attractive because it enables movement away from a deficit model of social care recipients towards focusing on individual strengths and personal agency, both of which may be especially pertinent in relation to adolescents as they develop their adult identities and become increasingly autonomous. The focal model has particular resonance in the lives of young people who have experienced disruption and trauma in or shortly before adolescence and is especially powerful in explaining the needs of late entrants into care. Application of Stein's categorisation of care leavers as 'Moving On', 'Survivors' and 'Strugglers' (2012), derived from resilience theory, has in this study enabled attention to be drawn to the way in which current policy, designed to incentivise young people to pursue further and higher education, privileges those who are already comparatively well-equipped to succeed in adult life. Combining these insights from the focal model of adolescence and resilience theory highlights the need to turn policy on its head to ensure that young people are not punished for their inability to address multiple challenges in their personal lives and education within the timeframes dictated by state institutions.

Considering this state of affairs through the lens of foundational rights brings into focus the particular assets required by young people as they approach legal adulthood and exposes the inherent injustice in such policies. Research in this area has generally remained welfare-oriented and rooted in social care discourses rather than underpinned by frameworks of rights. This circumstance may be a reflection of child and family social work itself, which has tended to be needs-based and to overlook considerations of children's agency, competence and rights (Goodyear, 2013). Further, although greater attention has been paid to children's participation rights in social care work in legislation and policy in recent years, Broadhurst et al. (2009) conclude that children's rights in general did not 'appear to fit easily' with the political priorities of the New Labour administration (page 251), while the rhetoric of the Coalition Government has tended to focus on strengthening families rather than on the rights of children as individuals. Yet 25 years after the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a framework of children's rights is becoming the dominant international discourse in the conceptualisation and measurement of national responses to issues

pertaining to child well-being; arguably greater use of analysis using a rights framework is overdue.

The value of Hollingsworth's conceptualisation of foundational rights lies particularly in its incorporation of relational aspects of the development of autonomy, which is a powerful response to the criticisms of commentators such as Smith (2009) that rights-based frameworks overlook the significance of relationships and social context within care work. This is very early work, but future research could usefully build on the concept of foundational rights in order to develop more concrete suggestions as to the nature and extent of the state's responsibilities in all areas of the lives of children for whom the state has seized parental responsibility. Such work should be underpinned by an expectation that children of the state are entitled not just to a similar level of 'parental' support as those who remain in the care of their birth parents, but to reparation for the harm they have suffered and that they are increasingly likely to retain a degree of dependence on parental support for many years after they attain legal adulthood. In particular, accounts of autonomy as a relational concept reinforce the argument made above as to the significance of personal relationships with supportive and caring adults in the lives of young people ageing out of care.

8.4 **Implications for policy and practice**

Legislation, policy and practice appear at last to have impacted on the educational attainment of looked-after children in mainstream schools. The focus of attention now needs to shift to the support available to young people over the age of sixteen. Initiatives such as the Frank Buttle Quality Mark for Higher and Further Education represent a welcome start, but the findings of this study support the statutory introduction of a designated professional role in further education colleges, as recommended by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012). There is a need for greater involvement by schools in liaising with the college estate to ensure that young people's needs are understood and that appropriate support is in place; and especially for increased understanding and provision for young people at college, to prevent the current high levels of drop-out. Both these developments are more generally applicable and are a matter of some urgency as the first cohort of children required to remain in education to eighteen progress through further education. The introduction of statutory status to the role of virtual school

heads is welcome but limited, as discussed above, and it is important that the remit of all virtual schools is extended to enable continuity of support to be offered to young people throughout their educational career.

As the average attainment of looked-after children rises and with the imposition of the requirement that young people remain in education and/or training to the age of eighteen, it is imperative that those outside mainstream schooling, young people who have become disengaged from education, and those who are unable to reach the government's target grades at GCSE are given the level of personal and professional support commensurate with their individual needs. It is of particular concern that the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and the Children and Families Act 2014 requiring ongoing support to care leavers continuing in education, and extending the time during which young people remaining in education may stay with their foster carers, will be expensive for local authorities to meet at a time when budgets for services for looked-after children and care leavers are under particular pressure. Consideration should be given to making the support of their corporate parent and of the virtual school available to all care leavers without discrimination until they obtain permanent employment. At the least, the Government should match the provisions of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 sections 66-67 by providing all looked-after children aged sixteen the right to remain in care until they are 21 and extending local authority support to them until they are 26.

Provision of careers advice is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the transfer of responsibility for careers advice from local authorities to schools effected by the Education Act 2011 is likely to have exacerbated the barriers to access to good careers advice for young people who are unable to follow a conventional path from school to work and was criticised by the House of Commons Education Committee (2013). The virtual school system may be able to fill this gap for young people ageing out of care in the way that an informed and motivated parent would do. In light of the absence of any single holder of parental responsibility for looked-after children, the role of the virtual head in monitoring and supporting the education of looked-after children should extend to all looked-after children within the local authority area, including those attending free schools and academies. This would strengthen the ability of virtual heads to ensure that looked-after children are able to take full advantage of legislation and guidance in relation to admissions and exclusion as well as providing quasi-parental

oversight of their academic progress. The passing of responsibility for administration of the pupil premium to the virtual head (Department for Education, 2014d) will help to ensure that this money directly benefits the students it is intended to support.

In terms of young people's broader care needs, this study has highlighted the continuing dearth of genuine parental figures in the perception of young people themselves. For the most vulnerable young people, close and supportive adult relationships may be especially challenging to achieve but are likely to be a pre-requisite for full engagement in learning. Arguably it is time to question whether the model of the corporate parent can adequately compensate for the absence of 'flesh and blood' parents, to use Freeman's term. Consideration should be given to the vesting of parental responsibility in an individual where possible and agreeable to the child themselves. There are a number of possibilities in this regard, which have been considered in section 7.4.2. Alternative models might fall short of investing a named person with legal parental responsibility but promote long-term relationships between children and adults whom they know or may come to know well. At the least, the most vulnerable young people must be provided with highly-skilled, consistent and enduring social work support until such time as their foundational rights might be regarded as having been adequately met.

8.5 **Recommendations for future research**

There have been numerous legislative and policy developments in education and social care since the Coalition entered government four years ago that impact on the lives of care leavers, aside from those introduced in direct response to the particular needs of this group. As a consequence, there are many areas of research which could fruitfully include consideration of the impact on this particularly vulnerable group of young people, such as the effect of the introduction of free schools and the expansion of the academies programme. In relation specifically to the education of care leavers, research to evaluate the effect of the Staying Put provisions of the Children and Families Act 2014 needs to be undertaken, but it should be designed in such a way as to capture the accommodation and support arrangements for all care leavers, not just those able to take advantage of the new statutory provisions. Particularly valuable also would be research on the experiences of looked-after children and care leavers in further education colleges, with a focus on the financial and practical pressures on young

people who are living independently or semi-independently and comparing 'drop-out' rates with those of their peers. The efficacy of the role of the virtual head should be further investigated in the complex context of a minimal statutory requirement for a sole professional operating in an increasingly fragmented education system and funded by a shrinking social care budget.

In relation to children's wider social care experiences, it would be valuable to explore the way in which the devolution of greater decision-making powers to carers operates and whether it has the desired effect of making children feel more 'at home' in their placements. In particular, attention should be given to how such arrangements are budgeted for; the extent to which they help to free up social worker time; the effect on relationships between young people, their carers and their social workers; and whether there is an impact on rates of placement breakdown and children's decision to 'stay put' longer.

There has been a limited response to Stein's suggestion that there is a need for greater use of theoretical insights to inform research on the experiences of care leavers, but a resilience perspective has been most commonly used. This study has attempted to demonstrate that Coleman's focal model of adolescence and a children's rights perspective can both illuminate the way in which recent policy initiatives have served to privilege the child that achieves at an apparent cost to the child who might be regarded as less of a credit to his or her corporate parent. There is much conceptual work to be done in relation to the notion of foundational rights, but future work drawing on young people's own understanding of their autonomy and the potential relationship between self-reliance and the development of 'full' autonomy would be valuable.

8.6 **The strengths and limitations of the study**

This is a small study, and I advance the findings with acknowledgement that the professionals who participated are not necessarily representative of all post-holders. As noted in chapter 4, teachers and virtual heads agreeing to take part in a study such as this are likely to be highly motivated by the challenges of the role and particularly reflexive in their professional practice. I have discussed the difficulties encountered in selection and access to young people in some detail in chapter 4. I will not repeat them here, save to acknowledge that the sample may well be regarded as no more than

opportunistic (see Barnard and Barlow, 2003), but that the diversity and characteristics of the young people participating do in many respects mirror those in the care population generally, including, for example, the fact that one third of the cohort was NEET at the end of the study.

Although it was not possible to include the perspectives of social workers and carers, the inclusion of designated teachers and staff in virtual schools ensured that the views of key policy-enactors contextualised the voices of the young people, as well as providing insights from professionals in relatively newly established roles who had consequently rarely been consulted in research. A further strength of the study is its longitudinal design. By meeting with young people each year where possible, I was not only able to follow their educational and care experiences over time, but I was able to see directly and to discuss with them the consequences of decisions that they had made in the light of hindsight. I was also able to develop a research relationship with some which enabled them to be more forthcoming with me in the third round of interviews than they were in the first, enhancing the confidence that can be placed in the findings.

8.7 **Conclusion**

Care leavers remain one of the most disadvantaged groups in society (Stein, 2006b; Jackson, 2007). There has been considerable debate as to the extent to which children's experiences in state care have had a remedial effect on their life chances or whether they may even have exacerbated the effects of early disadvantage. This has been neatly encapsulated in consideration of use of the terminology of 'low' achievement as opposed to 'underachievement' (Berridge et al., 2008). Although it is important to bear in mind that some of these young people, such as Ollie in this study, are in care for reasons which preclude them meeting population-level targets for attainment, recent statistics and research showing a narrowing gap between looked-after children's educational attainment and that of their peers appear to confirm that state care has not previously succeeded in maximising the opportunities of looked-after children to achieve their potential. Furthermore, the gap remains wide, suggesting that there remains much work to be done. Support for some of the most vulnerable members of society to fulfil their educational potential requires a sensitive and flexible response to

the needs of young people whose personal histories have prevented them from progressing in their education in line with the expectations of the school system.

Despite significant developments within the education system, including the introduction of designated teachers and virtual school heads, young people's opportunities in the educational arena are often at risk of being undermined by continued failings in the social care estate. The corporate parent must act not only as an educated and informed parent but also as a caring parent if it is to maximize the life chances of the children for whom it holds responsibility. Furthermore, it is vital that young people are not 'written off' and that their corporate parent provides the fullest support for its children to continue to develop their academic potential beyond Key Stage 4: care leavers should be entitled to the seamless and personal support typically available to their peers from their birth or adoptive parents. Perhaps most importantly, and also in line with the natural expectations society makes of birth parents, the corporate parent must be able to effect a personalized response to the needs of each individual child in its care and recognize that the most vulnerable children are entitled to the highest level of support for the longest period of time. If looked-after children are to develop their capabilities to the extent that will enable their foundational rights to be fulfilled so that they are ready to exercise full autonomy, the corporate parent must accept that reparatory responsibility imports an ongoing obligation to young people until such time as they are able to overcome the consequences of the harm they have suffered.

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Appendix 1

Legal Provisions

Appendix 1.1 - Legal provisions pertaining to the status of looked-after children

Definition of looked after child

Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'looked after' child as follows:

> (1) In this Act, any reference to a child who is looked after by a local authority is a reference to a child who is—
> (a) in their care; or
> (b) provided with accommodation by the authority in the exercise of any functions (in particular those under this Act) which are social services functions within the meaning of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, apart from functions under sections 17, 23B and 24B.
>
> (2) In subsection (1) "accommodation" means accommodation which is provided for a continuous period of more than 24 hours.

Children 'in care'

Children 'in care' are the subject of a care order. Section 31(2) sets out the 'threshold criteria' for the making of a care order as follows:

(a) a court may only make a care order if it is satisfied 'that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm' ; and
(b) that the harm, or likelihood of harm, is attributable to—
(i) the care given to the child, or likely to be given to him if the order were not made, not being what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give to him; or
(ii) the child's being beyond parental control.

Voluntarily accommodated children

Children may be accommodated voluntarily, or through a range of other processes. The provisions in relation to voluntarily accommodated children are set out in section 20(1), as follows:

> Every local authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of—
> (a) there being no person who has parental responsibility for him;
> (b) his being lost or having been abandoned; or
> (c) the person who has been caring for him being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.

The use of the word 'shall' in section 20(1) imposes a legal duty on local authorities to provide accommodation to children falling within this sub-section, who will then become looked after under the provisions of section 22. The local authority is also under a duty to children 'in need' who have reached the age of sixteen 'and whose welfare the authority consider is likely to be seriously prejudiced if they do not provide him with accommodation' (section 20(3)). This provision is most likely to apply to children who have run away from home or been forced to leave their parents' or carers' address.

The local authority also has a power (as opposed to a duty) to provide accommodation to further groups of children in the circumstances set out in section 20(4)-(5), as follows:

> (4) A local authority may provide accommodation for any child within their area (even though a person who has parental responsibility for him is able to provide him with accommodation) if they consider that to do so would safeguard or promote the child's welfare.
> (5) A local authority may provide accommodation for any person who has reached the age of sixteen but is under twenty-one in any community home which takes children who have reached the age of sixteen if they consider that to do so would safeguard or promote his welfare.

Under section 20, the local authority may generally not provide accommodation for a child if any person with parental responsibility is willing and able to provide accommodation for him or her, or to arrange for accommodation to be provided, and objects to the provision of accommodation by the local authority (section 20(7)), and any person with parental responsibility for the child may remove the child from local authority accommodation at any time (section 20(8)). However, there are a number of exceptions to these provisions, set out in section 20(9)-(11). Subsections (7) and (8) do not apply while a person or persons with a current residence order or special guardianship order in relation to the child or who have 'care of the child by virtue of an order made in the exercise of the High Court's inherent jurisdiction with respect to children' (that is, through exercise of the wardship jurisdiction) agree to the child being accommodated under section 20 (section 20(9)), although where there is more than one such person, all must agree (section 20(10)). In addition, if a child aged sixteen or over agrees to the provision of accommodation under section 20, then the local authority can

provide that accommodation notwithstanding the objections of adults with parental responsibility for the child (section 20(11)).

Three further considerations must be noted in relation to these provisions. First, the child accommodated under section 20 must be 'in need', a term defined in section 17(10), which states:

> For the purposes of this Part a child shall be taken to be in need if—
> (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part;
> (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or
> (c) he is disabled…

The term 'disabled' is defined in section 17(11) as follows:

> For the purposes of this Part, a child is disabled if he is blind, deaf or dumb or suffers from mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be prescribed; and in this Part—
> *"development"* means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development; and
> *"health"* means physical or mental health.

Second, in keeping with the importance accorded by the Children Act 1989 to the child's views, section 20(6) provides that

> Before providing accommodation under this section, a local authority shall, so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the child's welfare—
> (a) ascertain the child's wishes and feelings regarding the provision of accommodation; and
> (b) give due consideration (having regard to his age and understanding) to such wishes and feelings of the child as they have been able to ascertain.

Third, children who are accommodated under sections 17, 23B and 24B are excluded from gaining looked-after status. Sections 23B and 24B apply to the provision of suitable accommodation to 'relevant' children[12] (section 23B) and the provision of, or assistance with, the provision of suitable accommodation, to qualifying young people under the age of 25 who are engaged in full-time further or higher education (section 24B). The

[12] Defined in the Children Act 1989 s23A as a child who is not being looked after by any local authority; but was, before last ceasing to be looked after, an eligible child for the purposes of Sch 2, para 19B and is aged 16 or 17.

exclusion of children accommodated under section 17 has provoked a significant amount of case law, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice it to state, for present purposes, that although young people may be accommodated under section 17 – and indeed under other provisions, including those of the Housing Act 1996 – as a general rule, children in need should be accommodated under the Children Act 1989 section 20, such that they are accorded looked-after status[13].

Children who are accommodated under s section 20 lose their looked-after status upon detention through the criminal justice system, notwithstanding the recommendation of the House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee (2009) that the status should be retained during the child's incarceration. This would provide greater continuity of care, including on release, when children aged 16 or 17 would be eligible to benefit from the provisions for care leavers (subject to their having met the condition of having been looked after for a minimum of thirteen weeks, beginning after their fourteenth birthday and ending after their sixteenth: see Children Act 1989 schedule 2, paragraph 19 and the Children (Leaving Care) (England) Regulations 2001 (SI 2001/2874) regulation 3). Instead, however, section 23ZA of the Children Act 1989, inserted by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 section 15, requires local authorities to visit incarcerated young people who were accommodated under section 20 prior to their detention and arrange for the provision of appropriate advice, support and assistance. On the first visit, the local authority must undertake an assessment of the child's needs both in custody and upon their release, including consideration as to whether it will be in the child's best interests to become looked after once more upon their release[14].

Children Accommodated pursuant to other 'social services functions'

Under Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Social Services Act (LASSA) 1970, all local authority functions under Part III of the Children Act are designated as social services functions. Part III of the Children Act 1989, entitled 'Local authority support for children and families', comprises sections 17-30. Accordingly, all functions under section 21 of the Children Act 1989 ('Provision of accommodation for children in police protection or

[13] See R (G) v **Southwark** London Borough Council [2009] UKHL 26; and for commentary on this issue, see Driscoll, J. and Hollingsworth, K. 'Accommodating Children in Need: *R (M) v Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council*', *Child and Family Law Quarterly* vol. 20 no. 4:522.

[14] The Visits to Former Looked After Children in Detention (England) Regulations 2010 No. 2797 regulation 6 and (DfE)(2010) The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Local authority responsibilities towards former looked after children in custody para. 23.

detention or on remand, etc.') are social services functions for the purpose of section 22 and a child accommodated under section 21 will become looked after pursuant to section 22(1)(b).

In addition to children who are removed or kept away from home under Part V of the Children Act 1989 ('Protection of Children'), which provides for police protection of children and for emergency protection orders, section 21 covers a range of children who are accommodated through the youth justice system. These provisions are complex, but include the detention of arrested juveniles in local authority accommodation pursuant to section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (section 21(2)(b)); children remanded to local authority accommodation following arrest for alleged breaches of certain orders of the youth court under certain provisions of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (section 21(2)(c)(ia)), the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 (section 21(2)(c)(ii)), or the Street Offences Act 1959 (section 21(2)(c)(iia)); and children who are subject to a youth rehabilitation order imposing a local authority residence requirement or a youth rehabilitation order with fostering) section 21(2)(c)(iii).

Appendix 1.2 - 'Staying Put' provisions

Section 98 of the Children and Families Act 2014, which came into force on 13th May 2014, amends the Children Act section 23C by the insertion of section 23CZA, entitled 'Arrangements for certain former relevant children to continue to live with former foster parents'. Section 23CZA reads as follows:

> (1) Each local authority in England have (sic) the duties provided for in subsection (3) in relation to a staying put arrangement.
> (2) A "staying put arrangement" is an arrangement under which—
> (a) a person who is a former relevant child by virtue of section 23C(1)(b), and
> (b) a person (a "former foster parent") who was the former relevant child's local authority foster parent immediately before the former relevant child ceased to be looked after by the local authority, continue to live together after the former relevant child has ceased to be looked after.
> (3) It is the duty of the local authority (in discharging the duties in section 23C(3) and by other means)—
> (a) to monitor the staying put arrangement, and
> (b) to provide advice, assistance and support to the former relevant child and the former foster parent with a view to maintaining the staying put arrangement.
> (4) Support provided to the former foster parent under subsection (3)(b) must include financial support.
> (5) Subsection (3)(b) does not apply if the local authority consider that the staying put arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the former relevant child.
> (6) The duties set out in subsection (3) subsist until the former relevant child reaches the age of 21.

Section 98(3) inserts paragraph 19BA (Preparation for ceasing to be looked after: staying put arrangements) into Part 2 of Schedule 2 to the Children Act 1989 as follows:

> (1) This paragraph applies in relation to an eligible child (within the meaning of paragraph 19B) who has been placed by a local authority in England with a local authority foster parent.
> (2) When carrying out the assessment of the child's needs in accordance with paragraph 19B(4), the local authority must determine whether it would be appropriate to provide advice, assistance and support under this Act in order to facilitate a staying put arrangement, and with a view to maintaining such an arrangement, after the local authority cease to look after him or her.
> (3) The local authority must provide advice, assistance and support under this Act in order to facilitate a staying put arrangement if—
> (a) the local authority determine under sub-paragraph (2) that it would be appropriate to do so, and

(b) the eligible child and the local authority foster parent wish to make a staying put arrangement.
(4) In this paragraph, *"staying put arrangement"* has the meaning given by section 23CZA."

Appendix 2

Documentation evidencing the ethical conduct of the research

Appendix 2.1 – Approval from the Association of Directors of Children's Services

ADCS
Leading Children's Services

Jenny Driscoll
Child Studies
Department of Education & Professional Studies
King's College London, Franklin-Wilkins Building
Rm 2/15 Waterloo Bridge Wing
Waterloo Road
London SE1 9NH

By email

10th November

Dear Jenny,

Request for ADCS research approval – King's College London – The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after children to make a successful transition at 16+

ADCS ref: RGE101101

I write on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group regarding your request for research approval for the above named project.

The Research Group has considered your request and given its approval believing that the results of the project will be useful to local authorities. We would be grateful if when contacting local authorities you would quote the reference above.

The Group's encouragement to respond to the survey will be communicated to ADCS members in local authorities in England in the next edition of the ADCS weekly e-bulletin which is produced and circulated on Friday afternoons. A list of approved research projects can be found on the ADCS website. The Research Group wishes you well with the project.

As mentioned in the ADCS Guidelines for Research Approvals, please send the Research Group a copy of the full report and the summary of your main findings when the research is complete.

If you have any queries about this feedback, please contact me in the first instance.

Yours sincerely

Gary Dumbarton, **on behalf of Sue Wald, Chair of the ADCS Research Group**

The Association of Directors of Children's Services
Research Group, The ADCS Ltd, 3rd Floor – The Triangle, Exchange Square, Manchester, M4 3TR
Tel: 0161 838 5762 Fax: 0161 838 5756 Email: research@adcs.org.uk Website: www.adcs.org.uk/research
Registered in England & Wales. Company Number: 06801922. VAT registration number: 948814381.

Appendix 2.2 – Approval from Riversmeet

Fw: Research into the role of designated teachers
You replied on 30/07/2010 14:31.
Sent: 30 July 2010 13:40
To: Driscoll, Jennifer
Cc:

Attachments: Driscoll-designated teache~1.doc (439 KB)[Open as Web Page]

Hi Jenny

Our Asst Director for Childrens Social Care has seen your proposal and is happy with it - with the proviso that we need to clarify the consent issue in Sec 6.1 as PR for LAC accommodated under Sec 20 still rests with their parents.

xxxx and myself would be happy to meet you - we suggest 4pm on Tues Aug 17 or anytime in the afternoon of Fri Aug 20. Please let me know what would be best. Can you come here to xxxxx-

xxxx

---- Forwarded by xxxx on 30/07/2010 13:28 -----

Appendix 2.3 – Approval from Stonycross

RE: research on education of looked after children: xxxxxx Approval xxxxxxxxx

You replied on 27/07/2010 06:54.

Sent: 26 July 2010 17:20 To:

Driscoll, Jennifer

Dear Jenny,

I am pleased to inform you that the research has been approved to go ahead.
I will be on leave but will contact you on 1st September to discuss your requirements.

Kind regards,

xxxxxxx

Appendix 2.4 – Approval from King's College London

Research Ethics Office

5.11 Franklin-Wilkins Building
(Waterloo Bridge Wing)
Stamford Street
London SE1 9NH
Tel 020 7848 4077/4070/4020
Email rec@kcl.ac.uk
www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics

KING'S College LONDON

Mrs Jenny Driscoll
Child Studies Programme
Child Studies
Department of Education and Professional Studies
Franklin Wilkins Building
King's College London
London WC2R 2LS

09 September 2010

Dear Jenny

SSHL/09/10-36 The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after children to make a successful transition at 16+.

Thank you for sending in the amendments requested to the above project. I am pleased to inform you that these meet the requirements of the SSHL RESC and therefore that full approval is now granted.

Please ensure that you follow all relevant guidance as laid out in the King's College London Guidelines on Good Practice in Academic Research (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/college/policyzone/index.php?id=247).

For your information ethical approval is granted until **09 September 2011**. If you need approval beyond this point you will need to apply for an extension to approval at least two weeks prior to this explaining why the extension is needed, (please note however that a full re-application will not be necessary unless the protocol has changed). You should also note that if your approval is for one year, you will not be sent a reminder when it is due to lapse.

If you do not start the project within three months of this letter please contact the Research Ethics Office. Should you need to modify the project or request an extension to approval you will need approval for this and should follow the guidance relating to modifying approved applications: http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/applicants/modifications.html

Any unforeseen ethical problems arising during the course of the project should be reported to the approving committee/panel. In the event of an untoward event or an adverse reaction a full report must be made to the Chairman of the approving committee/review panel within one week of the incident.

Please would you also note that we may, for the purposes of audit, contact you from time to time to ascertain the status of your research.

If you have any query about any aspect of this ethical approval, please contact your panel/committee administrator in the first instance (http://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/ethics/contacts.html). We wish you every success with this work.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

Rowena Lamb
Research Ethics Administrator

Appendix 2.5 - Letter to head teachers requesting access

Department of Education and Professional Studies
King's College London
Franklin-Wilkins Building, Waterloo Bridge Wing
Waterloo Road, London SE1 9NH

Dear [Head Teacher],

I am a lecturer and researcher at King's College London, and am undertaking research in 3 London Boroughs into the role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after children in making the transition to further education or training. [Stonycross] is one of the boroughs which has agreed to this research taking place. I hope that the research will be of benefit to local authorities and schools in contributing to our understanding of how designated teachers can best support looked after children to continue in education or training post 16.

I would like to invite the designated teacher and any looked after students in year 11 to take part in this project. This will involve one interview with the designated teacher at school, at a time convenient to them, and an interview with each participating pupil at a place and time convenient to them, which does not interfere with their studies. This does not have to be at school; it could be in their foster placement or timed to fit with their LAC review. I would like to undertake the research in the first term of this school year because I appreciate that for year 11 students and their teachers, the focus will increasingly be on public exams as the year progresses. I would also like access to the students' school records and/or their Personal Education Plan records. Students should be aware that I would like to interview them again in years 12 and 13, but agreeing to the first stage interview would in no way place them under any obligation to be interviewed again.

More information is contained in the information and consent forms for the students and designated teachers, which are attached below, but please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this project further. If you are agreeable to your school participating in this research, please email me with the contact details of the designated teacher and I will contact them directly.

Best wishes,

Jenny Driscoll

Jenny.driscoll@kcl.ac.uk /020 7848 3101

Appendix 2.6 - Information sheet for participants (young people)

REC Protocol Number: SSHL/09/10-36/ *ADCS ref:* DGE 101101

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after young people to make a successful transition at 16+

I would like to invite you to take part in this original research project. You should only take part if you want to; you won't be treated any differently if you decide not to. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

In this research project, I want to find out how young people in care can be most effectively supported by schools in making important choices about their future when they reach the end of compulsory education at age 16, through interviews with designated teachers and looked after young people. I hope the findings will help schools and local authorities develop better education and careers services for care leavers.

I would like to interview about 20 young people on three occasions in total: around the start of year 11, at the end of year 11 or in the autumn immediately after; and about 2-2½ years after the first interview, when participants will be 17 or 18. But if you agree to take part in the first interview, it doesn't mean that you have to agree to later interviews: it is up to you each time. Interviews will take place somewhere convenient for you, such as in your home, and will take about an hour. In the first interview, we will talk mainly about your experiences at school and your plans for the future, although your personal life may come into it if it has affected your education. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, though, and you can stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. The interview will be taped, if you agree to that, but I will delete the recordings when they have been written up. You can also change your mind later and as long as you tell me before the end of *December 2010* I will take all the information you have given me in the first interview out of my report.

Everything you say will be treated as confidential, unless I am worried that there is a risk of harm to you or another young person, in which case I will inform the designated teacher or your social worker, as you prefer. No one will know who you are from the report, and you will be given an opportunity to check the report to make sure you can't be identified from it if you wish. You are also welcome to a copy of the final report.

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you think this study has harmed you in any way you can contact Professor Sharon Gewirtz (Sharon.gewirtz@kcl.ac.uk) at King's College London for further advice and information.

Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this study,

Jenny Driscoll Jenny.driscoll@kcl.ac.uk 020 7848 3101

Appendix 2.7- Information sheet for participants (professionals)

REC Protocol Number: SSHL/09/10-36

ADCS ref: DGE 101101

YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS INFORMATION SHEET

The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after young people to make a successful transition at 16+

I would like to invite you to take part in this original research project. You should only take part if you want to; choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

In this research project, I want to find out how young people in care can be most effectively supported by schools in making important choices about their future when they reach the end of compulsory education at age 16, through interviews with virtual head teachers, designated teachers and looked after young people in several local authorities. I hope the findings will help schools and local authorities develop better education and careers services for care leavers.

I would like to interview the virtual heads of 2 or 3 local authorities, together with about 10 designated teachers in total. I will also be interviewing looked after children in year 11 and as they make the transition to further education, training or the workplace at 16+. The teachers will be selected as being the designated teachers for the young people who will be interviewed. Interviews will take place somewhere convenient for you, such as your offices or school, and will take about an hour. Interviews will focus primarily on participants' experience of supporting looked after children in moving on to the next stage of their educational careers at 16, including liaison with professionals in further education and social care, and the use of the Personal Educational Plan.

You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to, and you may stop the interview at any time without giving a reason. With your consent, the interview will be taped, but the recordings will be deleted upon transcription. You may also withdraw your data from the project at any time up until the end of *December 2010*.

Everything you say will be treated as confidential, and all data will be anonymised. You will be given an opportunity to check draft publications arising from the study to ensure you or your authority or school can not be identified from it if you wish. You are also welcome to a copy of the final report(s).

It is up to you to decide whether to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you think this study has harmed you in any way you can contact Professor Sharon Gewirtz (Sharon.gewirtz@kcl.ac.uk) at King's College London for further advice and information.

Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in this study,

Jenny Driscoll Jenny.driscoll@kcl.ac.uk 020 7848 3101

Appendix 2.8- Sample information sheet to be read to SEN participant

FINDING OUT ABOUT WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE WANT TO DO WHEN THEY ARE OLDER

YOU CAN KEEP THIS!

Dear [Ollie],

Do you remember that we met last year and talked about what you would like to do when you leave school? It was part of my research on young people growing up in care. I'd like to talk to you again this year about what has changed for you.

You don't have to talk to me again – only if you want to. Just because you took part last year does not mean you have to do so again. Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand what will happen. Please take time to talk to people about it if you want to. You can ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like to know more.

I'd like to come to your school and talk to you for about half an hour. This time we will talk about any changes in your home life and school and what you think you will do next. You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can stop at any time without giving a reason. The interview will be taped, if you agree to that, but I will destroy the recordings when what you said has been written down. You can also change your mind later and as long as you tell me before the end of August 2012 I won't use the things you have said in my report.

I won't tell anyone what you say to me, unless I am worried about you or another young person, when I will tell your teacher, key worker or social worker, as you choose. No one will know who you are from the report.

If you want to take part you will be given this form to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. To thank you for your time, you will be given a £15 voucher from a choice of shops. If you think this study has harmed you in any way you can contact Professor Sharon Gewirtz (Sharon.gewirtz@kcl.ac.uk) at King's College London for further advice and information. Thank you for taking the time to think about taking part in this study,

Jenny Driscoll Jenny.driscoll@kcl.ac.uk 020 7848 3101

Appendix 2.9: Consent form: young people

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES – YOUNG PEOPLE

KING'S College LONDON
University of London

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after young people to make a successful transition at 16+

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: SSHL/09/10-36

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The researcher, Jenny Driscoll, must explain the project to you before you agree to take part.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask Jenny before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- ***I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify Jenny and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the end of December 2010.***
- ***I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998: it will only be used for the study, and it will not be possible to identify me from any publications.***
- ***I agree to be contacted in the future for follow up interviews, and understand that I don't have to agree to take part in later parts of the study if I am contacted again.***
- ***I agree that Jenny may access my school records for the purposes of this research project.***
- ***I agree to the interview being audio-recorded***

Participant's Statement:

I _____ agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed **Date**

Investigator's Statement:

I, Jenny Driscoll, confirm that I have carefully explained the nature, demands and any foreseeable risks (where applicable) of the proposed research to the participant.

Signed **Date**

Appendix 2.10: Consent form: professionals

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDIES – PROFESSIONALS

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet.

The role of the designated teacher in supporting looked after young people to make a successful transition at 16+

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: SSHL/09/10-36

Thank you for considering taking part in this research. The researcher must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. The information you have submitted will be published as a report and you will be sent a copy. Please note that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify you from any publications.

If you have any questions arising from the Information Sheet or explanation already given to you, please ask the researcher before you decide whether to join in. You will be given a copy of this Consent Form to keep and refer to at any time.

- ***I understand that if I decide at any time during the research that I no longer wish to participate in this project, I can notify the researcher and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the end of December 2010.***
- ***I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be treated in accordance with the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.***
- ***I agree to the interview being audio-recorded.***
- ***I agree that the researcher may use my data for future research and understand that any such use of identifiable data would be reviewed and approved by a research ethics committee. (In such cases, as with this project, data would not be identifiable in any report).***

Participant's Statement:

I _____

agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in the study. I have read both the notes written above and the Information Sheet about the project, and understand what the research study involves.

Signed **Date**

Appendix 3

Interview guides

Appendix 3.1 - Student interviews Year 11

Thanks *– hope to help other yp in care – JD not associated with school/LA – independent: from university – no right or wrong answers- what you think/want to do*
Information sheet *– stop any time – omit any qs- confidentiality/disclosure - recontact -withdrawal*
Consent form

1) How long have you been at this school?
    a. How did you come to be here?
    b. How many changes in school altogether?
    c. How have they related to your care history?
    d. How far from where you live is it?
    e. How far from birth family?
    f. Do you like being at this school?

2) What subjects are you doing at school?
    a. How did you choose those?
    b. Who helped?
    c. How much do you enjoy those subjects?

3) If you could do anything at all in the future, what would it be?
    a. Do you have any other career plans or a plan b?
    b. Where do you think you will be in 10 years? In 5?
    c. How easy will it be to get there?
    d. What might stop you achieving your goals?
    e. What help or support to you need to make it happen – and who from?

4) Have you thought about what you will study and where you would like to be next year?
    a. How did you make those decisions?
    b. Whose advice do you find most useful – SW, carer, school careers/Connexions, friends, designated teacher, birth family?

5) What do you do in your free time?
    a. What made you interested in that?

6) Do you have a personal education allowance? What have you used the money for?

7) Have you had/do you have 1:1 tuition? What in?
    a. How did that come about?
    b. How helpful have you found it?

8) Do you get much homework at the moment?
    a. How easy do you find it to settle to work?
    b. Who, if anyone, makes sure it is done?

9) If you have a problem with school work, who do you go to
    a. In school?
    b. Out of school?
    c. How easy do you find it to ask for help?
    d. Can you give an example?

10) If you have a problem not about school work, who would you go to?
    a. In school?
    b. Out of school?
    c. How easy do you find it to ask for help?
    d. Can you give an example?

11) How confident do you feel about new things eg moving to college?
    a. Is there anything you are worried about going into year 12 or to college?
    b. Is there anything you are particularly looking forward to?
    c. What do you think your strengths are?
    d. What do you think your weaknesses are?
    e. How do you think other people see you?

12) Have you done a pathway plan? (Have you moved to the leaving care team?)
    a. Do you have a social worker/personal advisor/both?

13) Have you had a Personal Education Plan recently?
    a. Who was involved?
    b. What targets were set?
    c. How useful do you find the process?

14) Do you have much contact with [the DT]?
    a. What about?
    b. Does s/he start the contact or you?
    c. Do all the staff at school know your care status?
    d. If not, who does?
    e. Are you OK about that?
    f. What about young people?

15) How important do you think qualifications are?
    a. What do you think about raising the age of compulsory education to 18?
    b. Can you think of a really good experience in school?
    c. Can you think of a really bad experience in school?

16) How involved is your social worker in your education?
    a. Do you think they think your education is important?
    b. What about your carer?
    c. Do your care and social worker work together well in your education?

17) Are any members of your birth family involved in your education?
    a. Do they think it is important?
    b. Are you influenced by your friends in the decisions you make?

18) Is there anything you would like to change about your education?

19) Is there anything you would change about your life in general?

20) Is there anything else you think is important we haven't discussed, or you would like to add?

Thanks Voucher

Appendix 3.2 - Student interviews Year 12

Thanks *– reminder: hope to help other yp in care – JD not associated with school/LA – independent: from university – no right or wrong answers- what you think/want to do*
Information sheet *– stop any time – omit any qs- confidentiality/disclosure - recontact -withdrawal*
Consent form

1. What are you currently doing/ studying for? [And where?]
2. Considering your plans when we met in year 11 (**have these to hand!)** have things worked out as you expected?
3. If not, why is that? [what qualifications did you get and how did they relate to hopes/expectations?]
4. How are you finding it so far this year? [Is it easier/harder/more interesting/less enjoyable than you expected?]
5. How well supported do you feel at school/college?
6. How does that compare with last year?
7. Is there any support that you don't have or had before that you would find useful (eg 1:1 tuition, mentor)
8. How well do you think you have managed the move overall? Have there been any particular problems?
9. Who is your main source of advice/support in school/college?
10. Do you have much contact with the designated teacher/safeguarding officer?
11. What are the best things about college/sixth form/apprenticeship/work/having time on your hands?
12. What are the worst things?
13. Have your plans for the future changed?
14. If so, how and why? How realistic/challenging are they? Where do you think you will be in 5 years?
15. Have your personal circumstances changed eg change of carer/move to independent living? How are you finding that?
16. Has that affected your work at all?
17. How have you found the change to the leaving care team?
18. How useful did you find the Pathway Plan procedure?
19. And how much say do you think you had in plans for your living arrangements?
20. How well supported do you feel outside school/college? eg support for education and career plans from social worker/personal adviser, carer, mentor

21. Has your relationship with your birth family changed at all as you have become more independent? How?
22. Looking back, would you have done anything differently? What?
23. Looking back, do you think other people – school, carer, social worker – could or should have done anything differently to support you to get where you wanted?
24. Looking back, how useful/important do you think it was to have a named teacher responsible for the education of all LAC in the school? Did it make a difference at transition at 16?
25. Do you think the PEP process helped make the moves smoother?
26. Do you feel more or less optimistic about your future now than you did this time last year? Why?
27. [when did you enter care and why?]
28. Do you think your educational opportunities have been greater or reduced as a result of going into care?
29. Has your life in general been improved by going into care?
30. Is there anything else you think is important or would like to add?

Thanks - voucher

Appendix 3.3 - Student interviews Year 12 (NEET)

Thanks
Information sheet – purpose – nothing to do with school/college/local authority – independent researcher from university - stop any time – omit any qs- [school records] – confidentiality/disclosure - recontact - OK to record?-withdrawal
Consent form

1) What are you doing at the moment? How long have you been doing that?
2) How did it come about / what were you doing before that? [when last in education/training, why left/did not continue]
3) Any qualifications? Have/working for?
4) If you could do anything at all, what would it be? Why?
5) Do you have any plans for future? [where do you think you will be in 5 years? 10 years?]
6) How realistic do you think they are? What might stop you achieving them? What do you think will be most important to help you realise your ambitions?
7) Do you have any plans to study/train in future? What? Why?
8) Whose advice have you asked/taken in making study/training decisions? School/college/Connexions/SW/foster carer/key worker/birth family/friends?
9) How helpful was it?
10) [if going to college in September] Is there anything you are worried about in going to college?
11) Is there anything you are particularly looking forward to?
12) How long have you been living here? How long living semi-independently?
13) How do you find it? What are the good things? What are the bad things?
14) How did it come about (living semi-independently? [your choice or decided for you?]
15) Has moving to live on your own affected your education/training or plans for education/training at all?
16) What do you like to do in your free time? How do you fund that?
17) Do you have/did you have a Personal Education Allowance? What was it used for? Did you get any choice in that? Was it useful?

Looking back:

18) [When last at school?] Do you remember PEP meetings? Who attended? Who did you discuss targets with? How useful were the meetings?
19) Can you think of a really good experience at school
20) Can you think of a really bad experience at school?
21) Did you have/do you have 1:1 tuition? In what subject(s)? How useful was that?
22) How long have you been/were you in care for?
23) Any changes in education as a result of becoming looked after? Did you change school? How many changes of school in total?
24) Did you have any say in choosing the school(s) you went to?

25) Do you remember having Personal Education Plans? Have you had a recently? Who was involved? What were the targets set? Did you find it useful? What if anything would you change about PEP process?
26) Did you have much contact with the designated teacher?
27) Did all the teachers at school know your care status? Who? Why? Happy with that?
28) Did your friends at school all know your care status? Who? Why? Happy with that? [what about at college?]
29) Is there anything that might have persuaded you to stay on at school?
30) Do you have key worker and SW? How long had each? How many changes?
31) How involved is SW in education/career decisions? Do you think they think your education is important?
32) Have you done a Pathway Plan? When? Who did that with you? How helpful was it? Is there anything that could make the process better?
33) How important do you think it is to get good qualifications?
34) Soon, everyone will have to stay in education or training to 18 – do you think that is a good idea?
35) Are any members of your birth family involved in your education? Do they think it is important?
36) How confident are you at handling new things?
37) What do you think are your best qualities?
38) How do you think your friends see you?
39) Is there anything you would change about your education in general?
40) Is there anything you would change about your life in general?

Is there anything else you think is important or would like to add?

Thanks Voucher

Appendix 3.4 - Student interviews Year 13

Thanks
Information sheet – purpose – nothing to do with school/college/local authority – independent researcher from university - stop any time – omit any qs- OK to record?- withdrawal
Consent form

1. How would you describe your current situation - are you 'in care' or a 'care leaver' or fully independent?
2. What sort of accommodation are you living in? [independent/semi-independent/with family/with foster carer] [when did that change and why?]
3. What would you describe as your key priorities in life at the moment?
4. Who is/are the most important person/people in your life at the moment? [girlfriend/boyfriend, peers, birth family, foster family]
    a. Do you have any long-term plans in your personal life – cohabitation/marriage/family?
5. What are your main interests outside work/study at the moment? – and how do you spend your free time? [how much do you see of foster family, birth family]
6. How optimistic/good do you feel about your future in terms of your personal life? Why? Has that changed in the last couple of years?
7. what are you currently doing/ studying for? [And where?]
    a. if STUDYING, go to 9
    b. if WORK/UNEMPLOYED/APPRENTICE, go to 11
8. have you gained any qualifications (AS/BTEC/NVQ) since we last met?
    a. If so, what?
    b. Are you pleased/disappointed/as expected?
    c. What are you studying for now?
    d. How are you finding it so far this year?
    e. How well supported do you feel at school/college?
    f. How does that compare with last year?
    g. What/who is your main source of support/advice at school/college?
    h. is there any support that you don't have or had before that you would find useful (eg 1:1 tuition, mentor)
9. what are your plans for next year? [university/work etc]
    a. If university, what arrangements have the local authority made for your support and vacation accommodation etc?
    b. Do you intend to work (or think you will need to work) to supplement your student grant?
10. How long have you been working/unemployed/in apprenticeship? How are you finding it? [if job, how secure is it? – apprenticeship, how long for?]
11. Do you think you would like to /need to return to education again in the near future? If so, what and why?

12. Have your long term career plans changed? If so, how and why?
13. How much practical/financial support do you get from the local authority? How often do you see social worker/key worker/ personal advisor? What about others outside education – friends, siblings, family?
14. How well do you think you are managing/will manage financially?
15. How [are you finding]/ [ready do you feel for] independence?
    a. What's good/less good?
    b. Are you comfortable with managing food, washing, organising your time?
    c. Have you passed your driving test?
16. How optimistic do you feel about your future in terms of work or career and supporting yourself financially? Is that more or less optimistic that when we first met 2-3 years ago?
17. Age at entry to care? To what extent do you think your experiences before coming into care have affected your future chances in life? How? Why?
18. To what extent do you think your life chances have been affected by your experiences in care? How and why?
19. Do you have a particular role model/inspiration in life? [Could be someone you know or someone in public life.]
20. looking back since year 10, would you have done anything differently at school/college? What?
21. looking back, do you think other people – school, (including designated teacher), carer, social worker, Local authority, family – could or should have done anything differently to support you to get where you wanted?
22. looking back, how useful/important do you think it was to have a named teacher responsible for the education of all LAC in the school? Did it make a difference at transition at 16?
23. What was
    a. The best thing
    b. The worst thing about being in care?
24. what if any changes would you like to see arising from your experience of the care system and of the education system?
25. Is there anything else important or that you would like to add?

Thanks - voucher

Appendix 3.5 - Interview guide - Designated teachers

1) Please explain your primary role within the school.
2) How did you come to take on the designated teacher role, and how long have you been in the role? [extent to which participants chose to take on the role or were allocated it?]
3) How many looked after children have you been responsible for in total and how many are at the school at the moment? [consider asking further about children in need] [no of local authorities involved with]
4) What are the principal issues that have arisen in your role as designated teacher?
5) Are there and particular priorities and/or challenges at the moment?
6) Roughly how much of your time is required [and allocated?] to your designated teachers duties?
7) What types of support are available to you at school in carrying out your role? [including admin support, pastoral staff]
8) Are all staff made aware of children's care status? [if not, which staff are told?] Why? [statutory guidance: role includes helping staff understand how LAC learn]
9) What types of support are available to you at local authority level in carrying out your role? [including links with other DTs, virtual head system]
10) How valuable do you think it is to have a teacher designated for looked after children? [in what ways is it most valuable?]
11) What is the level and nature of your direct contact with the looked after children in your school [associated difficulties eg children not wanting to be singled out]
12) What is the level and nature of your contact with a) the virtual head; b) carers [statutory guidance: role includes ensuring young people are prioritised in 1:1 tuition] and c) social workers?
13) How [well] does the personal education plan (PEP) system work in your experience? [strengths, weaknesses, differences across local authorities][statutory guidance: role includes developing and implementing PEP at school and ensuring young people have a role in setting their learning targets]
14) What has been your experience of Pathway Plans?
15) To what extent have you made use of 1:1 tuition for looked after children? [statutory guidance: role includes ensuring young people are prioritised in 1:1 tuition]
16) How has the Personal Education Allowance been used for the looked after children at your school?
17) What training has been made available to you/have you undertaken?
18) Are there any additional measures you would like to see in place to support you, either at school or local authority level? [How confident do you feel in the role?]
19) How effective do you think the virtual school model is/can be in supporting the education of looked after children?
20) How do you see your role in encouraging high aspirations amongst looked after children?
21) What role do you play in planning and supporting young people's transition to further education? [include relationships with colleagues in sixth form or further education colleges, social workers and Connexions/careers advisors][statutory

guidance: role includes enabling a smooth transition to FE college or other provision at 16]

22) (where appropriate) What is your school's sixth form entrance policy?
23) Do you feel in your role any tension between the needs of young people with disrupted educational histories and the pressures on schools to drive up attainment?
24) Where have the looked after children you have seen progress post 16 moved on to? [6th form /FE college/ work/ other] Why have they stayed/left the school?
25) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3.6: Interview guide - Virtual school heads

1) Could you tell me a little about your professional background?
2) How did you come to take on the VHS role? How long have you been in the role?
3) How does the VHS roles fit into Children's Services (ie heads LACES/sits in Education or social care)?
4) How effective do you think joint working between education and social care is in the authority?
5) Is there a governing body for the virtual school? If so, who sits on it?
6) What have been the main changes since starting the role? (both implemented by you and imposed on you?) What have been the key challenges in your role to date?
7) What are your main strategic priorities as VH at the moment?
8) Can you tell me something about the numbers and profile of the looked after children in your virtual school (ie in the authority), and how they compare with the national population - in particular the ages at which children enter care, SEN and mental health statistics and the profiles of those still in care at 16;
9) How does the virtual school track the progress of LAC, and up to what age does it do so?
10) Do you think there should be targets for the numbers of LAC progressing to FE and HE?
11) What are the most common issues and concerns that are brought to the virtual school by designated teachers for your advice?
12) How much contact do you have with designated teachers, and what kind of support is offered by the authority to assist designated teachers (including eg training, help in accessing funds)?
13) How much contact do you have with further education college safeguarding officers and what has been your experience and role in supporting the transition of looked after children to further education or training? (also role of DT)
14) Do you have any views on whether LAC are likely to be better supported by schools or FE colleges in years 12-13, or what the respective advantages and disadvantages might be?
15) Some designated teachers have said that in their experience there have been difficulties for some young people in year 11 when they move to the leaving care team arising from a change of social worker and/or anxiety about potential changes in their care arrangements – is this something experienced in your authority?
16) How effective do you think the Personal Education Plan process is in the authority and how is it managed (eg pre PEP meetings with young people)?
17) How effective do you think the Pathway Plan process is in the authority and how well are educational transitions at 16 integrated into that procedure?

18) How effective did you find the Personal Education Allowance scheme, and how do you think the Pupil Premium will compare for the LAC in your authority?
19) How useful have you found 1:1 tuition for LAC?
20) Are there any specific strategies relating to a) enhancing the educational qualifications attained by looked after children in the authority (including eg award days) and b) preventing care leavers from becoming 'NEET' (not in education, employment or training);
21) What is your involvement in relation to the exclusion of LAC? How sympathetic are school heads towards making exceptions for LAC – and should they have special treatment?
22) What is the role of the virtual school in relation to persistent LAC absences?
23) How well supported do you feel your role is in relation to training, VH networking and the priorities of the local authority?
24) Does the virtual school have a policy on extra-curricular activities for LAC, or is this a school-level decision?
25) Where young people are educated in your authority but in care to another, how well do arrangements for supporting the education of those young people work? What difficulties have you encountered (if any)? What about LAC in care to your authority but educated out-of-borough – do you have any involvement with them?
26) What proportion of LAC are in alternative provision? Often these seem to be private, and no teacher is 'designated' as such – and seemingly they often aren't aware of DT training etc offered. What if any steps do you take to ensure LAC in alternative provision get the same level of advice and support as those in mainstream schools?
27) How do you think the government's proposals eg to reduce the role of (and funding to) LAs and allow schools to commission services directly from independent providers is likely to impact on the virtual school system?
28) Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 4

Data analysis

Appendix 4.1 – Coding sample

Codes *In vivo*	[What about in the designated teacher role, do you have any specific priorities?]	**Categories**
Pastoral-*safe*-attachment?/ *perform well at school*/ *extra parent*/ *advocate for that child*/carers variable/*extra parent*/ inexperienced carers/*parental advocate*? *extra parent/advocate for that child*/[not] performing well/talk to teachers/ sensitivity: child unaware/Extra ed support/ hate being singled out/ relationships? /*not wanting to look different*/ Low self esteem?/*Sensitive*/ *explain our children to the teachers*/ inexperienced	The priority is them **feeling secure and safe** and **being able to perform well at school**. It's almost like you are acting like an ***extra parent.*** I see myself as being the ***advocate for that child*** inside the school. Some of the carers are brilliant, and really have their fingers on the button, but some don't, so you are acting like the ***extra parent***, helping them, because they might not have been through the system, you know, they might not have had children going into the sixth form, so you are acting like that extra person out there, as a **parental advocate**. I remember with our previous head we used to talk about the role, that was the main thing, you are like the ***extra parent, the advocate for that child***, if that child is **not doing well** you will **talk to the teachers**. But the **child themselves will not be aware of that.** Hate being…people like R, R has got **lots of extra support in class**, but he just **hates the person sitting next to him**. It's almost like distance support, for someone like R, who is **so conscious of *not wanting to look different* – I'm not a freak, I'm not thick**, blah blah blah. So you have to be **really, really, *sensitive***. And that's the sort of work you do, you **work with teachers**. One of the big roles I've always thought I have is to ***explain our children to the teachers***, because lots of our teachers are **very young, very inexperienced**, like Teach First, for example, wonderful, bright,	**?attachment/ Pastoral/Attainment** ***Extra parent*** ***Advocate for child*** ***Extra parent*** ***Extra parent*** ***Advocate for child*** **Attainment** ***Explain our children to the teachers?*** **Same as the rest** ***sensitive*** ***Explain our children to the teachers***

teachers/ naïve teachers/ *Advocate for ch* to teachers?/*explain our children to the teachers*/	you know, head spinning with the idealism, but **staggeringly naïve, and just haven't lived**, you know, so you are almost ***explaining the children to those teachers.***	***Explain our children to the teachers***
	[I think the concept of an 'extra parent', as it were, is an interesting one, given that parental responsibility for these children is either vesting in nobody, or the local authority, and not in an individual].	
	Yes, yes, yeah.	
	[Is that something that is a difficulty in your role..?]	
Fulfilling role/ Corporate parent/ *Statutory duties* (duty not care?)/ SW quality/ *extra parent*/ SW quality/	I wouldn't say it's a difficulty. It's one of the ***fulfilling*** things to be able to do. The local authority, to be honest, really can't do that sort of role. It seems to **follow its statutory duties**, and don't quote me on this, but it **so much depends on the quality of the social worker.** In terms of this being an **extra parent** bit, I've got to say, and I want to be anonymised on this, there is a **real issue with the quality of the social workers** who deal with the children.	**Corporate parenting** **SW quality** ***Extra parent*** **SW quality**
Good SW/ PEP variable/ *Tick box*/ Relationships with SWs /SW turnover/ Unsettling/ SW turnover (too many people)	Things like PEPs for example, if it's a **good social worker**, on the ball, it's **just done so well**. If it's not it's a ***tick box* or not done at all**, seriously, not done at all. And you find this again and again, and you **build up a relationship with one social worker, and boom they are gone. The turnover is phenomenal. And the unsettling effect that has on the students can be awful, because they are constantly, constantly, getting a new social worker.** I'm messing your structure	**Process vs engagement** **SW continuity** **?attachment**

Well meaning/ Leaving care team destabilising/ *I'm being dropped / Damaged-fragile* Relationships SWs	up, but as the ideas come to me…I'll give you a good example, it is so *well meaning* to have the **leaving care team for LACs, but my God they feel as if – hey, *I'm being dropped!*** You know, their feelings are, they've **got to know this person**, and don't forget they've come from ***damaged, fragile*** backgrounds, they've **got to know this person** and suddenly they are told – leaving care. Hang on, you know, **D's looking after me**, what do you mean leaving care? And you have to really – woah, no, no, no, it doesn't mean you are going to be dropped. But just because it's called the leaving care team, and it's a **different person**…	**SW continuity** **rejection** ***damaged*** **SW continuity**

Domains:

Yellow: power/seniority

Pink: PEP/pathway plans/PEA

Green: pastoral

Aqua: designated teacher/virtual head

Blue: school

Orange: social care

Red: 16+ transition

Purple: looked after children (individual)

Sky blue: carers

Brown: training

Appendix 4.2 - Sample memo 'explain our children to the teachers'

explain our children to the teachers	
?**Mr Brown** suggests that teachers do not necessarily come equipped with experience of the type of family difficulties LAC bring to school (is this particularly true of high-achieving new teachers from Teach First?) Teaching as a middle-class profession?	***One of the big roles I've always thought I have is to explain our children to the teachers, because lots of our teachers are very young, very inexperienced, like Teach First, for example, wonderful, bright, …head spinning with the idealism, but staggeringly naïve.***
'our' children – sense of responsibility even parental role?	
Ms White: This quote also suggests LAC are 'different' [link up with 'same as the rest' in terms of not wanting to be singled out, but here suggestion is there needs to be different treatment]. Special treatment suggested?	***making sure that staff are aware that they are looked after children, and that sometimes dealing with a looked after child might be different to dealing with another student, you know, in terms of confrontation, and keeping in touch with a carer, and letting me know as well, because with other students if things go wrong it goes through the head of year, or the head of department, whereas with a looked after child it needs to go through them, and through me, so it's a bigger circle, if you like.***
'Difference' here – and elsewhere- tends to be defined in terms of behaviour: link with 'expectations of bad behaviour'. Here there is concern with/expectations of 'confrontation'. This seems to be the explanation for need to make all staff aware of LAC status – but see statutory guidance 3.2 'Everyone involved in helping looked after children achieve should appreciate the importance of showing sensitivity about who else knows about a child's looked after status'. What is the situation in other schools – are all staff informed of status or only on a 'need to know' basis?	***… at the beginning of the year we have an inset day, and I made all staff aware who the looked after children are, and how to manage them, I suppose, in their behaviour, and if there are any issues with their education that they should contact me. And I do that regularly, just have to keep reminding them sometimes, because teachers do sometimes forget, and don't realise that there's other issues surrounding a child's education.***
One of many references to 'managing' looked after children – there is academic 'performance' management, but also behaviour management. Authoritarian ethos of schools demonstrated here?	

Highlights tension between need to 'manage' and 'control' behaviour and need for sensitivity and special treatment. Also *other issues surrounding a child's education* relates to 'can't separate academic and pastoral'.	
Ms Teal: Again an emphasis on ensuring staff understand children may look like yours – but they won't behave like them (slightly sinister?!). Also behaviour: *goes beyond the norm* – it is (bad) behaviour that makes them 'different' but there is sensitivity in understanding of 'what it is to be looked after' (again, something 'different'). Here intimation of need for 'special treatment' - *you can't treat them just as you would everyone else*.	***trying to get across to staff they may look like one of your own children at home, but they are not, they've really got early childhood trauma, and developmental trauma, and these children don't trust adults, so the behaviour goes beyond the norm. You know, you can't treat them just as you would everyone else, you have to be a lot more aware of the triggers, and a lot more aware of what you are asking of them*** ***I think actually it's very important that somebody in school has an understanding of what it is to be looked after. I think there is that something different.***
Ms Gold: Here again focus on need for staff to understand where LAC are coming from – special treatment? Recognition of 'pressures' and 'outcomes' – 'can't separate pastoral from academic'?	***we regularly in school have inset days and sessions after school, and over the course of the year there's always a different focus, because the school need to have that, and I've shared with staff some information that I've brought back from one of the [local authority] meetings, which was to do with understanding all the pressures on children in care, and how they learn, and I actually put it onto the school shared area, so that staff could also have a look at expected outcomes for looked after children, and the challenges and the journeys they may have been through, so the staff have a better understanding of the background to some of these young people.***
Wider perspective from **Ms Rose** as inclusion manager – 3 or 4 *most challenging* students, not all will be LAC, but again expectation that LAC are likely to be challenging. (Important to remember that LAC are diverse group; that in school they are a small group	***as an inclusion manager … I have an hour, every September, at the beginning of school, the first day of school, straight after the headteacher's introduction, it's my session, where I would introduce new students to school, and it's only three or four who are the most challenging, …so we have two***

amongst a larger pool of vulnerable students inc challenging/SEN/CIN etc).	*looked after this year, they are currently in year eight, but when they were coming in year seven I did have a lot to explain what the circumstances were, what the issues are, how they can help them out. We record all of our interventions on the (I 43.11) recording system, so all the teachers will have access to it, and something I want to try now to attach documents to it, how you could actually encourage their learning in school, or these are strategies you could do for these particular students, they are not necessarily just because they are looked after, but actually they need this, or she might need to sit in front of a class for something, or she might find this (I 43.36 COULD BE – distracting – OR – disrupting – OR..?) but if there are very specific things that are happening in their lives we have a good system of communication with their pastoral leaders, and then we would let them know what's happening, and it would be passed on to teachers, as much as they need to know, that maybe in this particular period she might be slightly unusual, so just bear that in mind, there is something else going on.*
A reference again to need for explanation of these children (*a lot to explain)* – but it's about *how they can help them out*. (Very warm atmosphere at Garden House). Also sensitivity here on *as much as they need to know* – confidentiality of status may not be attainable but sensitive information is contained and 'managed' by DT.	
Reiteration by **Ms Teal** of importance of staff training – can't expect staff to understand LAC – again need for explanation.	***We have done whole staff training, because I think it's the staff training that's one of the big issues*** ***I think for our mainstream high school teachers it's quite hard to get their head around it, and I don't, the thing about somebody just raising the flag, they wouldn't have an understanding of it really.***
Ms White another aspect of 'explaining children to the teachers' appears to be mediating between pupil and teacher! (?special treatment here?) Demonstrates though that Ms White is accessible for LAC – cw very senior members of staff who tend to be more 'hands off' and delegate interaction with yp to form teacher/head of year/pastoral leaders – also issue of	***Yeah, they'll come, and it's usually if there's a problem, normally with a teacher they'll come straight to me, and say there's been a problem, and that sort of thing.***

sensitivity though, as don't like to be singled out as 'different'. **Mr Green:** reluctance of young people to be 'explained' to teachers? – links to 'same as rest', need for sensitivity, who needs to know?	***And you know, we'll say to them who do you need to tell? Who do I need to tell about this? And they say no-one. And I say I need to tell Miss F, I'll tell L because she's easy to get hold of, and kind of knows these things, and I'll tell your tutor, and I'd like to tell your teachers. And they'll say no. And I don't think a single kid has ever asked…you know, if things are going wrong then I'll tell teachers, but if you try and involve them in it they just don't want anybody to know, which is fair enough.***

Appendix 4.3: Diagram - Reconciling care and education